



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

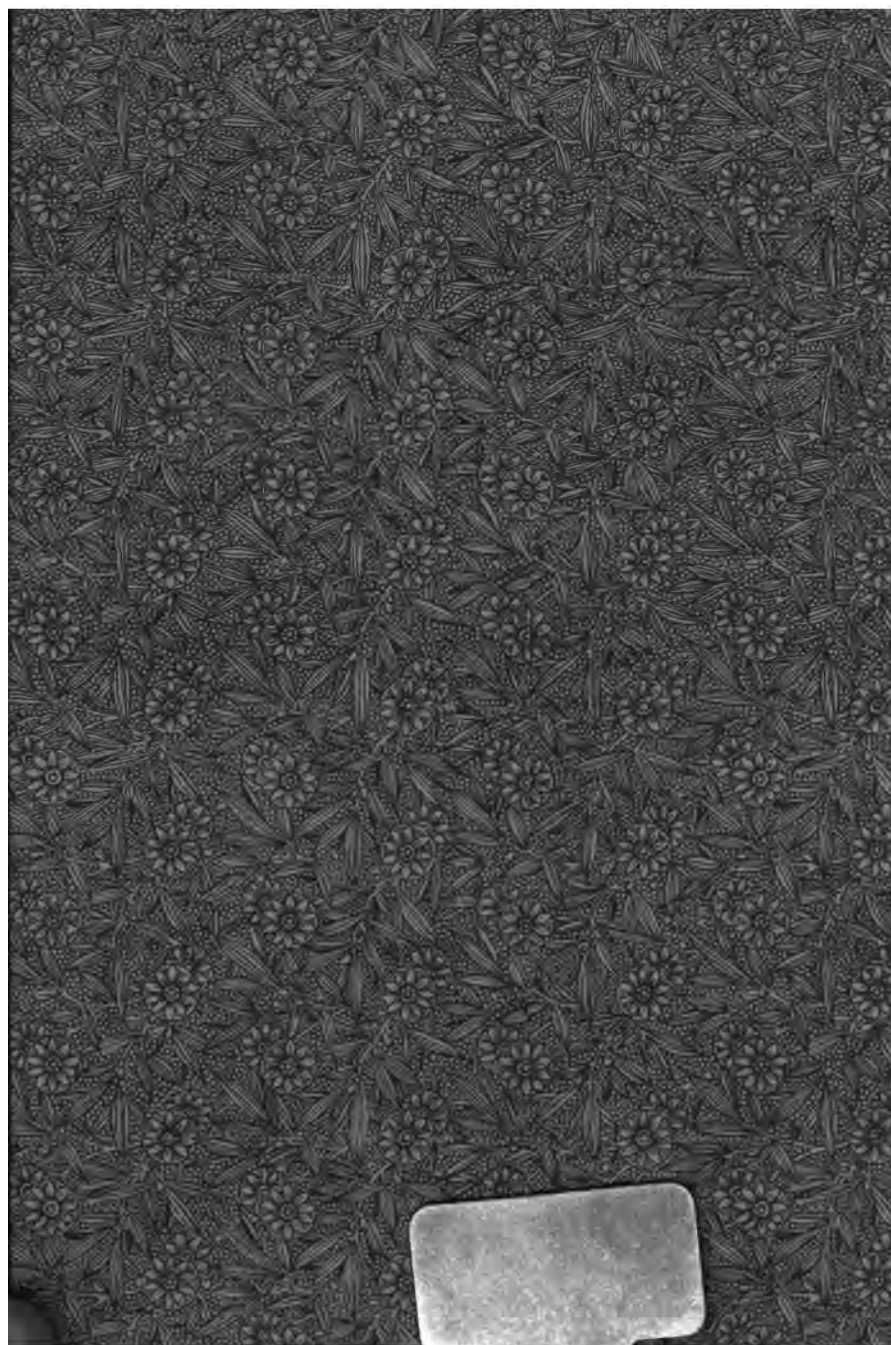
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>









600056465W

OF ALL BOOKSELLERS.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

EL DORADO.

A NOVEL IN TWO VOLUMES.

"Mr. LEIGH has already made his name in literature; he writes with power and deep feeling, whilst his books betray in every line a refinement rarely to be found in the ordinary Novel. Excellent as 'Maud Atherton' was, we are inclined to think that his present work, 'El Dorado,' far surpasses it, not merely in the skill of the plot and greater strength of the characters, but also in purity of thought and delicacy of touch."—*Graphic*.

"The two volumes contain some excellent writing, touches of humour and pathos, dark scenes relieved by bright and amusing interludes, and a few charming samples of verse. . . . Indeed, the tone of the book is altogether above the ordinary; and the teaching, though a little stern, perhaps, is wholesome, strengthening and refining."—*Illustrated London News*.

"So far as refinement of style and tone, and the consistent working out of pure and lofty conceptions, can make a good Novel, Mr. LEIGH's 'El Dorado' is entitled to be so described. . . . The leading motive is artistically developed, and the story is refreshing reading by virtue of its utter unlikeness to the great mass of the fiction of the day."—*Scotsman*.

"The Author has far more than the average powers of description."—*Westminster Review*.

"An extremely well-told story."—*Whitehall Review*.

"There is that in 'El Dorado' which may give scope for happy auguries."—*Morning Post*.

"There is some very amusing writing in 'El Dorado,' and it is well worthy of a novel reader's perusal."—*Court Circular*.

REMINGTON & CO., 134, New Bond St., W.

AT ALL LIBRARIES.

FETTERS OF MEMORY.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

ALFRED LEIGH.

AUTHOR OF "EL DORADO," "MAUD ATHERTON," &c.

VOL. I.

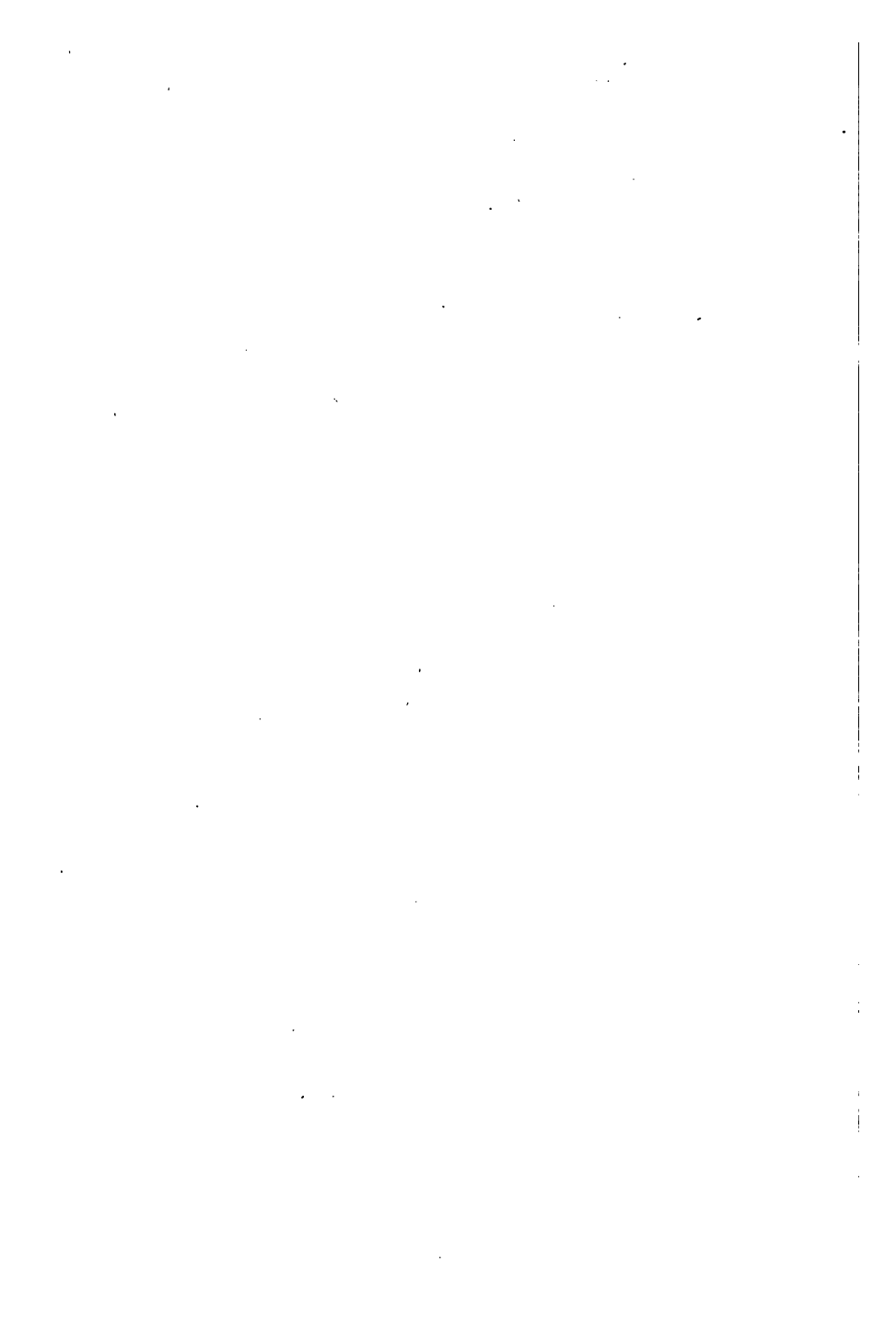


London :
REMINGTON AND CO.,
NEW BOND STREET, W.

1882.

[All Rights Reserved.]

251. k. 35.



TO MY SISTER,
Augusta,
IN MEMORY OF MANY HOURS
BRIGHTENED BY HER GENTLE COMPANIONSHIP,
AND IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION
OF HER READY SYMPATHY
WITH ALL MY AIMS AND IDEALS,
I dedicate this book.

FETTERS OF MEMORY.

CHAPTER I.

"The cruel crawling foam,
The cruel hungry foam."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

THE wild storm wind, which moaned through city streets, and round gay houses, till it checked the glad course of song and dance, grew into a power strong with exultant mockery, as it swept over the desolate wastes of cliff and sand.

Houseless wanderers, drawing their rags closer together, crept shivering into what poor shelter they could find; while in happy homes, mothers and maidens grew pale, as they thought of sons and lovers far away at sea.

But to no one could the wind sound more merciless, than to Grace Easton, as she sat beside her child—a little girl of five years old, who slept as

calmly as though the tempest were singing her a lullaby.

Their home was only a fisherman's cottage—small, low-roofed, and scantily furnished. The lamp which burned steadily on the table, showed little to distinguish it from the similar dwellings to be found all along the English coast, except an old harp, a few books, whose well-worn condition, was unmistakably suggestive of continual use; and two or three framed engravings which hung upon the walls. The fire blazed brightly, and the little room had an inviting aspect of comfort—that strange undefinable charm, which no wealth or artificial refinement can give a house whose inmates are dull or churlish; but which is so apparent in some homes, that to explain it we must recall the faith of our childhood, and fancy they have grown bright through the influence of some gentle fairy's kindly spells.

No princess was ever prouder of her palace than Grace Easton of that lonely cottage; and this was the hour when life generally seemed gayest—when the boat was drawn up on the beach—when the hard work of day was over—when toil and peril

might be forgotten until the morning, or thought of only as memories pleasant to recall, beside the glowing fire.

But to-night, she seemed restless and ill at ease. Many times she had gone to the cottage-door, and looked out anxiously into the stormy darkness—often she had mistaken some sound without for an approaching footstep; but on every occasion she had been disappointed, and had resumed her knitting, with the same evident unrest of heart and mind.

“He is very late,” she murmured to herself; “and all the tales of storm and shipwreck I have ever heard, are haunting me to-night like ghosts. What a cruel wind it is!”

Her unfinished work fell from her hands as she listened. It was indeed a terrible night; and through all the noise of wind and rain, she could hear with what immense force, the waves broke on the shingly beach below.

At last she could bear it no longer, and determined to end this intolerable suspense by action. Hastily wrapping round her head and shoulders a rough boating jacket, the fittest protection she

could find close at hand, she took the lantern from the nail where it always hung, and having lit it, turned to the child, who was by this time awake, and watching her mother's proceedings with wondering eyes.

"Alice, I am going to meet father."

"In all the rain?" said the child.

"Yes; I am wrapped up you see. You will not be afraid to be left alone?"

"No mother."

"There's my own brave little birdie," said Grace kissing her, "I shall be back soon."

She left the lamp burning, and had reached the door, when actuated by a sudden impulse, she turned back, and stood once more beside the little bed. The child laughed gaily, as she threw her arms round her mother's neck, evidently thinking the farewell and the return, part of a merry game; but Grace Easton's lips moved as if in prayer, although no articulate sound escaped her. Kissing the child again, she said—

"Fare thee well little one, and God guard thee ever."

Then she went out alone in the stormy night.

The lantern which she carried, enabled her to find the familiar path without much difficulty, but gave no distant light. Everything seemed vague and indistinct to her—the drenching rain which was whirled in every direction by the wind—the blurred lights along the coast—the waves loud, threatening, and unseen—the wild confusion of all these, had a terrible likeness to her own heart, with its unshaped anticipations and incoherent dread.

As she strained her eyes to pierce the darkness, a light appeared upon the beach below. It flickered, and slightly changed its position, as though being passed from hand to hand, but had no other movement. She watched it anxiously for some minutes, and finding it neither advanced nor disappeared, she took the steep path leading to the beach.

Probably the light belonged to some fisherman who might bear tidings of the missing boat, or could, at all events, give her information of some kind. She was very wet, and shivering with cold; but this, in her excited condition, she scarcely knew. Thought had become merely a hurrying

crowd of bewildered ideas, and all feeling was subject to the dominant impression of impending sorrow.

As her feet touched the sand, the light began to approach her. Its progress was so slow, and her own steps so rapid, that at first she was unconscious of this; but at length she perceived it was carried by a man followed by five or six others walking in a kind of procession, with a regularity which contrasted strangely with the usual gait—careless and shambling—of the Seaferu fishermen.

“Who goes there on such a night as this?”

“It is I—Grace Easton. Can you tell me anything of Harry?”

She recognised the voice of the man who had spoken to her. Jack Datchby was an old weather-beaten sailor, who had faced all kinds of peril for fifty years; but he seemed afraid of Grace, and answered with unwonted hesitation.

“Harry—he’s at home, isn’t he? ’tain’t no night for fishin’.”

“I know it isn’t, and I begged him not to go out this morning; but you know how reckless he

is, he only laughed at my fears. Oh ! what shall I do—what shall I do ? ”

She had not noticed the hesitation of Datchby's speech, or the compassion in his rough hard face ; but now as she uttered this appeal, she turned to the other men, and saw that they were standing close together, as though hiding something. Before she could ask the meaning of this, Datchby said very huskily :

“ Ye must go home lass, and we'll bring ye word o' Harry. Why ye are wet through a'ready, an' no wonder. Nights like these is bad enough for we, let alone such soft young things as ye.”

“ Why do you talk like this, and why are you standing so close together,” she cried, “and why do you look at me as though you pitied me ? ”

“ Lass,” said the old seaman, “let me take ye home, I tell ye this be no night for the likes o' ye.”

“ But you do not answer me—you are hiding something—tell me if you know anything of Harry, for God's sake ! ”

How could they answer her ? There were tears in the eyes of more than one of them, as they

watched her, so young and helpless, standing before them there.

"He's in God's hands on sea or land," said one of the men, "leastways so parson says—I don't know much about it."

"Lass," said the man who had spoken to her first, "ye are but a child to me, and for all that ye've lived among gentlefolk, and are soft-spoken as a lady yerself, take an old man's advice. I knew Harry when he was but a pretty boy, no bigger than your own child. If ever ye loved her, or if ever ye loved him, or if ever ye loved your own life, let me take ye home."

"I tell you I care nothing for myself," she cried wildly. "Why do you stand here making speeches? Give me one word; I will not have more. Have you seen him?"

The old man covered his eyes with his hand and said nothing. The dullest of the bystanders (and they were all rough, ignorant men, unused to fancy or sentiment of any kind) would have borne a heavy sorrow gladly, if he could have gained thereby the power to comfort her.

The silence lasted only a few seconds, but such

moments are terrible with the weariness of protracted torture. Then, with the sudden strength of desperation she sprang forward, and pushing two of the men aside, discovered what it was they concealed from her.

Part of a broken boat, covered by the fragment of an old sail. Was that all? Before any hand could check her, she had torn the covering away, had recognised the cold, unchanging face beneath, and with one long, piteous cry had sunk on the ground beside it, to all appearance as motionless and still.

The young fisherman whom she sought lay beside her silent and dead. Only a few hours before he had left her in the full vigour of his athletic youth, laughing at her fears, and whistling the light refrain of a careless tune ; now the first scene of life was over, and the real drama had begun.

The fishermen lost no time in words. Before Grace Easton's grief they had been helpless as children, but the moment action was possible they could act like men.

"One o' ye run as hard as ever ye can for the doctor," said Datchby, kneeling beside the pros-

trate form. "She's more than half drowneded herself, an' I'm sure I ain't surprised. If I don't have rheumatics to-morrow, I never see a storm in my life. Steady there, boys—bear him gently. I'll carry the girl myself; one o' ye had better run into the village and ask some o' the women to look arter her."

His suggestions were promptly obeyed. When he reached the cottage with the unconscious girl in his arms, two of the fishermen's wives were already there.

In the past they had envied her beauty, and the other advantages she possessed over them, but now all the sympathy of their sex and class asserted itself, and their voluntary service had all a mother's tenderness. It would be well for many a cynic if he would leave his easy chair and the contemplation of a moral mirror, and study reverently the self-abnegation of the poor.

All this while, Grace was unconscious and silent, save for an occasional moan, but when the doctor arrived he found her delirious, and excitedly re-enacting in her disordered imagination the scenes of the night.

"Why do you evade my questions?" she cried. "You stand together as though you hid something, and I had a dream once that the cruel waves had beaten him to death. Oh, God! was it a dream? I cannot tell; all is confused, and my head is burning."

She held her hands to her head, and tried to collect her scattered thoughts. After a few moments' pause, she resumed rather more calmly though still speaking very rapidly—

"Who said that I married beneath my station—that I might have married a gentleman? It is idle folly. No gentleman is like my brave, bright Harry. Hark! Was that his footstep at the door?"

"It is a bad case," said the doctor. "It is easy to understand this. She was in delicate health, she was thoroughly drenched by the rain, and then came all this agitation you tell me of. At the best this will be serious, at the worst it will be fatal. Poor child—and so pretty."

He was young, and had not learned the professional indifference which views humanity in the light of a great machine the wheels of which are

constantly getting out of order—a circumstance necessitating their repair, or, if that is impracticable, the substitution of new iron in their place.

So he gave the needful instructions for the nursing, promised to return soon, and drove thoughtfully away.

And while all this was being done in the little cottage the fatherless child still slept quietly on, undisturbed and happy.

Dream on, little Alice, while rest is possible, for with waking will come loneliness and pain. Life's initiation into wisdom is stern and hard, and he must be strong indeed in his philosophic manhood who never fancies that it would be better to wander always in the childish palaces of fairyland than to learn the soul-weariness taught by a close companionship with the world. Daybreak will teach thee that there is a mysterious force in the universe called Death, which can touch loving hearts with sorrow as with an icy hand. Even so, little Alice, will the dawning of womanhood bring a deeper sense of the extent of Death's dominion, for faith and honour, joy and hope, are dying silently every day.

CHAPTER II.

"But Criste's lore and His apostles twelve
He taught, but first he folwed it himselve."

CHAUCER.

THE Reverend George Ellis was sitting in his study, as he invariably called it (though his researches there had never been of an abstruse or systematic character), making futile attempts to concentrate his thoughts on the composition of a sermon for the approaching Sunday.

The church at Seafern was a small building, belonging to an undecided order of architecture, which expressed no idea so clearly, as the probable poverty of its founders; and the difficulty they experienced in obtaining financial credit.

The storms that had beaten and buffeted its walls, had not improved their appearance; and just as there is a period of awkward transition between the unconscious grace of childhood, and the nobler energy of maturity, it was noteworthy that the little church was old enough to need re-

pair, but not sufficiently ancient to be venerable or picturesque.

The Vicarage adjoined the church, and had at least this merit, that it suggested no impertinent contrast to it, by possessing superior youth or beauty; for the rest, it was small, old-fashioned, and singularly inconvenient.

Yet Mr. Ellis had lived there for fifteen years, and whatever may have been the ideas with which he had first regarded it, he had long ceased to consider that his home or his church left anything to be desired.

But now, as he sat alone, he was evidently sad and troubled, and although he had been engaged on his present task for nearly an hour, one short sentence upon the paper before him (lined through and then rewritten), was the meagre result.

He was a man about forty years of age—tall and athletic, with a face frank and kind, but neither handsome nor striking. Constant exposure to rough weather, had given him more the appearance of a sailor than a clergyman, and his long isolation from the great world that lay beyond the Seafern hills, had had a similar effect

on his mind. The fishermen would probably have answered in the affirmative, if any one had asked if Mr. Ellis was clever, and might even have added that "parson had read a sight of books," but they rarely thought of him in this light, generally regarding him as one of themselves—wiser and better no doubt, but not much richer, and as ready as any one of them to face peril or endure privation—to handle an oar, or furl a sail.

His work among them had been a course of sympathetic and helpful companionship, his teaching, plain manly truths, expressed in simple words, which even the children understood and loved to listen to. His sermons would have made a very indifferent literary work, and their theology might not always have found favour with the religious journals, but they fulfilled the needs of their hearers better than many far more scholarly or original discourses could have done.

Simple and inartistic as they were, they were not without a rugged strength, linked with a pathetic tenderness. The tangled questions wrangled over by contradictory schools of theology, he scarcely touched upon; and his nature was not

sufficiently imaginative to grapple with the deeper mysteries of daily life; but when his strong voice uttered an indignant protest against meanness, falsehood, or cruelty, it was impossible not to respect him, and when his deep tones were modulated in the utterance of an appeal, the roughest of his listeners found it hard to be indifferent.

But now it was evident his thoughts were not upon his task, and when the striking of a clock roused him from his unwonted reverie, he looked ruefully at the single sentence on the sheet of paper before him, and shook his head.

“ ‘The storms of life should be faced like the storms at sea,’ ” he murmured to himself, repeating the words he had written, “ ‘bravely, silently, and without complaint.’ Yes; it’s easy to write it—but how can I tell the poor lads that? ”

He pushed the paper from him, and began pacing up and down the room, still talking to himself, a habit of his, whenever he was undecided about anything, due probably to his solitary life.

“ How can I tell them that, when I can’t do it myself? ” he continued, “ I despise cant, and

thought I never talked it, yet I have asked them to believe something like that, over and over again. Is it true—is it true ? ”

There was something whimsical in the puzzled earnestness with which he repeated the inquiry as if addressing an unseen oracle. At length he resumed—

“ It is only half the truth at best, for the literal storms don’t last for weary years, and heartache and disappointment are worse than cold winds and drenching spray.”

He paused at the window, to watch the sea which was glittering merrily in the sunshine.

“ So calm—so bright—so happy—only a lazy ripple on the beach, and the golden waves playing with the rowing-boats, yet it is the same sea that beat a brave man to death a fortnight ago. The village will be a dull place without Harry Easton.”

He sat down again and made another attempt to finish his sermon, but with no better success than before, for after writing a few sentences, he laid down his pen, and locked his papers away.

“ It’s of no use,” he said wearily, “ I can’t work this morning. It was a mistake my ever

being a parson at all, I ought to have run away to sea, as I often threatened to do ; I think I should have made a pretty good sailor, my arms are strong, and there was always a fascination for me in wild seas till Harry died. There again, whatever I think of, it's sure to come back to that."

On his table were a few magazines and reviews ; he took one of them up, and tried to read, but the effort to divert his mind was evidently fruitless, for after a few minutes he laid it down, and went on again with his broken soliloquy.

"These writers are philosophers, and I am not, they are learned, and I have forgotten three parts of the little I ever knew ; but I can't find that they have arrived at a much clearer view of life than I. They use very long words, they all seem tired and hopeless ; and each declares the other is wrong. I won't try to solve a problem that has no clue ; action is the only thing that makes life possible."

He touched the bell as he spoke, and in a few minutes his only servant appeared at the door. She had evidently passed the time of life when ladies are apt to be confidential concerning their

age, but it was easy to detect, that she could still surpass many younger rivals in energy and ability to work ; her dress had an uncompromising air of stiffness, her apron was not a coquettish embellishment, but an ample garment of obvious utility, her well-starched cap seemed to utter a continual protest against the folly and impiety of forsaking the beaten paths of ancestral wisdom. Her whole appearance was formal, but faultlessly neat, and her face though rather severe was not unpleasing.

“Where is the little one, Mary?” said Mr. Ellis.

“She’s in the best bedroom sir, asleep. You see she was awake nearly all night crying, and she’s tired herself out, poor little thing, and no wonder.”

“I am going out for an hour or two. Do you think I should disturb the child if I went into the room to see her first?”

“I shouldn’t think so sir, she’s very sound asleep.”

With a step almost womanly in its lightness, Mr. Ellis followed her into the room where the

subject of their conversation was sleeping; the child lay on a very large bed, which formed a disproportionate frame to her small figure; her cheeks flushed with tears, and her brown hair disordered by her restless movements. She clasped to her heart a headless doll, but whether it had been decapitated for an imaginary moral offence, or had suffered the extreme penalty of the law, through absence of mind on the part of the executioner, was not clear. The clergyman gazed at the child and the broken doll, with something of the same perplexity with which a little while before he had regarded life; then stooping down, he touched the little face with his lips and left the room.

In a few minutes he appeared outside the house, and after several delays occasioned by casually encountered parishioners, needing consolation for numerous ills, spiritual and material—by sundry children, whose heads it was imperatively necessary to pat, and even by stray dogs vociferously demanding recognition, he reached the high road leading from the village.

His long strides receiving no further check, he soon arrived at his journey's end—a large house, stately, old and desolate.

Seafern Hall had been in the Fenwood family for so many generations, that the old housekeeper was in the habit of making altogether reckless assertions about its antiquity; which, although devoutly believed by her rustic hearers, were generally received with worldly scepticism, by the few tourists who strayed so far from the haunts of men, as to visit this secluded building.

Perhaps no one truly loved the Hall, except this old housekeeper; but she had never wavered in her affection for half a century (which is at least fifty times as long as the average duration of human affection), a fact, due partly to the instinctive clinging of continual custom, and partly to the sentiment—now rapidly becoming extinct—of feudal loyalty.

She loved to hint darkly at spectral legends—to say with a sapient shake of the head, that she had seen strange things in her time—that no earthly consideration should induce her to be alone in the long corridor at midnight, with many other equally mysterious observations, which were always broken off in the middle, and produced an effect that proved the artistic expediency of leaving much to the listener's imagination.

In reality however, the history of the Hall was singularly destitute of striking features ; for the Fenwood family had been remarkable for nothing so much as consistent mediocrity.

Utterly destitute of interest, no house can be, that has ever been brightened by a fair face, or made musical by a sweet voice ; but the owners of Seafern Hall, had lived there with unvarying monotony, till it became the property of Reginald Fenwood, the father of the present occupant.

He had been of a bolder and more restless disposition, and preferring the life of cities, had left his boyish home to the care of a steward, and the undisturbed possession of a few old servants—the rooks and the owls.

All kinds of vague stories were current about this man's life for many years, and rumours were unwontedly unanimous, in affirming that he had repeatedly brought grief and dishonour on his friends and relations, by his reckless profligacy. These whispers however, became fainter and fewer in course of time, and after his death his name was almost forgotten ; until two years before the period of this story, Seafern was startled by the

announcement that the son of Reginald Fenwood, intended returning to the house of his ancestors; and that the old Hall would be inhabited once more.

Of course this intelligence reawakened a host of rambling stories, and hazy recollections. Conversation in the parlour of the village ale-house, and other chosen places of resort, gained a new interest—as parliamentary debates lose their normal dulness, when the fall of a ministry seems probable—as the lisping platitudes of a fashionable drawing-room, become utterances of vivid energy, when the reputation of an absent beauty is under discussion.

All the old inhabitants told over and over again, remembered or imagined incidents of the Fenwood family; while those who could neither recall nor invent, solaced themselves with reflecting that “folks at the Hall ’ud need a power of fish,” that boats for pleasure parties would often be required—in short, that there would be a revival of trade, with such tangible results as better food to eat, and warmer clothes to wear.

But popular anticipation had been disappointed,

as it often has been, since the frogs lost faith in hero-worship, and began to doubt the policy of an absolute monarchy. The gay assemblies of courtly ladies and noble gentlemen that were to revive the vanished glories, never came, and only one wing of the Hall was rendered habitable; the remainder of the building, being left to moulder and crumble into unheeded ruin as of old.

John Fenwood came, it is true, and with him his only child—a boy of five years old; but he steadily avoided society, courteously repelled the friendly overtures of all who approached him; rarely went beyond his own grounds, and succeeded in making his voluntary isolation complete.

“It’s a dreary place,” thought Mr. Ellis, as he paused a moment at the gates, and looked at the ruinous mansion, “no wonder that people say it’s haunted; my little home seems gay in comparison. Does the man *prefer* being miserable? He has kept me at such a distance, that I hate to ask a favour of him. I am growing selfish, and I don’t like being humbled. That’s pride too, and I thought”—

The good man shook his head (clearly discouraged at the discovery of so much unsuspected evil in his disposition), and after a word of kindly greeting to the lodge-keeper, who opened the heavy iron gate, walked rapidly up the long avenue leading to the Hall.

CHAPTER III.

LUCIO. Ay, touch him : there's the vein.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

MR. ELLIS's knock was answered by a servant, whose sedate appearance was quite in keeping with the general character of the Hall. Whether it is that strongly marked characteristics possess a kind of mesmeric magnetism, whereby they attract objects of a kindred nature, from the remotest regions of the earth, or whether it is that all things animate or inanimate, become imbued with the leading idea of their surroundings, it would be hard to say ; but it is an undeniable fact that in most houses, everything is more or less suggestive of the inmates. There are homes for instance where a benignant welcome is expressed in the convivial tones of the knocker ; and stern dwellings, where even the umbrella stand, seems ponderous with the severity of theological reproof.

With a half-wondering, half-amused conscious-

ness of this, Mr. Ellis followed the butler (for the decorous domestic presided over the mysteries of the dark wine cellars, like an early Christian worshipping in the catacombs), to the library, where he waited with some impatience for Mr. Fenwood's appearance.

"A scholarly collection of books," he said to himself, after hastily glancing at some of their titles; "but not a lively one. H'm, Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and German—that means long study or travel—probably both. Histories, of course, which look as though he had never read them—essays on every kind of dull and hard-headed subject—philosophy in the same key—ponderous brown folios, antiquarian I suppose, and scientific works most numerous of all. It sounds comprehensive, but there isn't the ghost of a poem, a play, or a novel, on all the shelves. I should have a chronic headache, if I lived amongst books like these. He's a long time coming, I wonder if there's anything more attractive to read."

After a little consideration, he took down a political work; and tried to fancy himself interested in its contents.

“ ‘All reasonable views of life, are based upon carefully ascertained statistics,’ ” he read aloud in rather a despondent tone (“then I must be an unconscious idiot, for I never had the faintest grasp of figures—all sums over ten thousand are the same to me); ‘and this being so, it is obvious that differences of opinion, spring from erroneous or imperfect information. We think that the institution of a college of statisticians would result in entire national unanimity on all subjects: moral, intellectual, and theological. It would also discourage and ultimately abolish poetry, which we regard as a species of mental disease, fatal to the accurate exercise of philosophic thought.’ I wonder how long my brain would stand a course of this kind of study; rather less than a week I fancy.”

He replaced the book, and going to the window, began to count the trees in the grounds; though whether from a desperate desire for occupation, or in conformity with the theory he had just been reading, is not certain. If he was actuated by the latter motive, he had no opportunity of arriving at a just conclusion, for he had only

reached the thirty-eighth tree, when Mr. Fenwood entered the room.

He was probably a year or two younger than his visitor, but looked by far the older man of the two. His figure was slight, his face thin and careworn, his manner listless and abstracted. The muscular vigour, glowing health, and sailor-like activity of the clergyman, would have made his lightest endeavour seem a matter of the utmost urgency ; while Mr. Fenwood on the other hand, had so little superfluous vitality, that it would have been easy to imagine him watching his house in flames, with languid unconcern.

“This is an unexpected pleasure Mr. Ellis,” he said, in a tone which by no means conveyed the idea that it was a pleasure at all.

“I wonder what the correct reply to that is,” thought the other ; “these polite common-places always bewilder me. I should be more at home in a little rowing-boat, in the middle of the Atlantic, than in a London drawing-room.”

However he only said, in not very appropriate reply :

“Thank you ; you are well, I hope ?”

"Yes—at least not very well."

"I trust there is nothing serious the matter with you," said Mr. Ellis, with quick sympathy.

"It is not worth mentioning, merely a headache and general languor, ailments you giants know nothing of."

Hardly knowing whether to take the last remark as a compliment or the reverse, the vicar proceeded to attack his companion on what he knew to be his vulnerable point.

"And your boy; how is he?"

"Thank you, he is very well indeed, he grows brighter and handsomer every day."

The entire change in the speaker's voice and manner, directly this slight allusion was made to his child, was remarkable. George Ellis had not very subtle or very rapid powers of mental discrimination; but no distant sail was ever plainer to his bright eyes, than the guiding thought—the single deep emotion of John Fenwood's life.

"I am glad to hear you say that," he said, "he is a fine boy. A difficult question the training of such a high-spirited child as this, Mr. Fenwood."

"Yes," returned the other rather nervously.

"I suppose it is ; but I think my system is the right one ; he will remain at home until he is eight or nine, and then—though I don't like to think of it, I shall send him to school."

"It is a pity he has no companions near his own age ; if he had a brother now"—

"I am glad he has not ; he is so high-spirited—his will is so strong that it is dangerous to thwart him, and I know he would bitterly resent anything like rivalry."

The father, always animated and eager when talking about his son, evidently regarded these unlovely traits with high admiration. Mr. Ellis (who was quite unaccustomed to dissimulate, and not very skilful in maintaining a polite silence, when he felt strongly on any subject), could scarcely refrain from expressing his decided conviction, that so high a spirit was merely a selfish one ; and that the petulant force of will, which could not brook contradiction invariably became vacillating weakness ; but foreseeing that so heterodox an observation would be fatal to the object of his visit, he repressed the words by a strong effort, and said merely—

"Still you must feel the necessity of childish companionship for such a nature. A sister would be his playmate without being his rival."

"Yes," said Mr. Fenwood thoughtfully, "I suppose she would; but it is no use talking about what can never be."

This was the opportunity Mr. Ellis had sought from the beginning: he had roused this cold reserved man into the betrayal of strong feeling, and determined to make his appeal without further prelude.

"Most of us are too reckless in the use of the word impossible," he said. "I should not have intruded upon you this morning, Mr. Fenwood, without what seemed to me sufficient reason. I wish to speak to you about a difficult and delicate matter. I am a plain man, and shall do so very imperfectly, no doubt; but I will state the question as honestly and as briefly as I can. I make no further preface; for it refers to what we have been talking about, and strongly affects your boy."

The interest expressed in Mr. Fenwood's face, had been growing fainter in the anticipation of an

irrelevant appeal; but the last words had the desired effect: he inclined his head to indicate his willingness to listen, and thus encouraged, Mr. Ellis resumed—

“You doubtless remember the young fisherman Harry Easton”—

But here the other interrupted him:

“I beg your pardon, but my life here has been so secluded, that I do not know any of the villagers’ names.”

“But you must remember this one; a young, handsome man, tall and strong, with blue eyes, and brown curling hair; your boy has been in his boat a hundred times.”

“Yes; I remember now, what of him?”

“It is a sad story; he was always bold to recklessness, and a fortnight ago when all the other fishermen stayed at home, foreseeing the storm that was brewing, he laughed at their fears, and persisted in venturing out to sea as usual. No man living on this coast, will easily forget that night; many a gallant ship was wrecked in the storm, and you may fancy what it must have been for that poor lad to face, in such an egg-shell of a

boat as his. He made a noble fight for it I am certain, but his boat went to pieces, and his body was washed ashore on the sands below, and found by some of his old comrades."

George Ellis covered his face with his hands, and his hearer saw them tremble; in the brief silence that ensued, there was heard something like a stifled sob; which given by a strong man, has in it something terrible and unnatural; but the struggle was not a long one, and before his companion could attempt to comfort him, the clergyman continued—

"I thought I had more command over myself; but I am like a woman when I think of this. It is not a strange or unusual story—all sailors brave it when they go to sea; but when a mother hears her boy has been shot in battle, it is poor consolation to tell her a thousand other men have been killed too; but it is not of myself I wish to speak. The young fisherman was married, and his wife—a mere girl—was alarmed at his long absence on so wild a night. At last I suppose she could bear the suspense no longer, and went out in the wind and rain, to see if she could glean any tidings of him. It was a mad thing to do, for

she was in delicate health at the time, and rough sailors would not have braved such a night if they could have helped it. When she reached the beach she was wet through, but far too excited to turn back. Here she met some of the other fishermen, and eagerly asked if they could give her tidings of her husband. They tried to persuade her to go home, but in vain; and after a few words which seem to have frightened her without preparing her mind, she suddenly discovered the truth."

"Were they the men who had found the body?"

"Yes, and they were then carrying it to some place of shelter. The poor girl saw all, and fell fainting by his side."

"What did the men do?"

"One of them carried her home, while the others ran for help. The shock she had sustained (for they had loved each other deeply), and the drenching rain did their work only too completely. She lingered on—weak and feverish—for some days, but yesterday evening while I was standing by her bed, she died."

"Was she unconscious to the last?"

"I think not, although she uttered no coherent words. About half an hour before the end, I thought I saw a change in her face, and told them to bring her child into the room. They did so, and she made a faint sign of recognition; then I put the little girl by her side, and she tried to kiss her. After this she placed her thin hand on the little one's hair, and looked appealingly at me: she said nothing, and no words were necessary, for I should have been blind indeed, if I could have mistaken the meaning of that mute appeal; after that she sank rapidly."

There was another pause: John Fenwood had never been a profoundly sympathetic man, and the tendency of long isolation, is to foster selfishness; but the simple tale of love and sorrow, told with a brevity so stern and a grief so undisguised, would have touched a harder heart than his; so there was unusual gentleness in his voice, when he at length spoke.

"It is a sad story, as you say, Mr. Ellis, very sad. Is there anything that I can do? You said something about a child—a little girl; if you think of opening a subscription list, you may rely upon any support I can give you."

"You are very kind," was the quick reply, "but that is not my object. It would not be difficult to find a home for the child. Her mother's father is a boat builder, and well-to-do I believe, but he was very severe and harsh to his daughter at the time of her marriage; considering that she ought to have made a match more advantageous, from a worldly point of view. I think he would undertake the charge of the child if I asked him, but I cannot forget the past, and I should not like to expose her to probable neglect, and possible unkindness. I would sooner she found a home with some fisherman's family; and poor as they are, I know there are at least two cottages in the village where she might go."

"What is the objection to that?"

This question seemed difficult to answer, for Mr. Ellis hesitated, moved uneasily in his chair, dropped a book he had been mechanically holding in his hand, and was a long time in picking it up. At length, however, he said:

"It must be difficult for you to understand how I feel in this matter, I am a lonely old bachelor, with no relations living, and few friends; but one must love something, and so Harry Easton and

his wife were like son and daughter to me. It would not seem strange to you if you knew all; but any way, strange or not—I cannot bear to think of their only child having to fight the world unaided. Life is so hard when fish are scarce, and bread is dear; and if I could bear to think of little Alice being hungry and meanly clad, I could not endure that all likeness to her pretty young mother should be crushed out. Yet it might be so—faces are made coarse by certain influences, and souls too.”

“What do you propose then?” said Mr. Fenwood, who was gradually relapsing into his old listlessness of manner.

“I should like best of all to take the child myself; but I am poor and have saved nothing. If I could afford the money for the present (and even by the strictest self-denial it seems scarcely possible), I could make no provision for her in the event of my death, so after all I might be conferring a very doubtful boon. Therefore, after fully considering the matter, I have determined to appeal to you.”

“To me?” echoed John Fenwood in a bewildered tone, for he had not in the least antici-

pated this conclusion, "did you say you appealed to me, Mr. Ellis?"

The clergyman was about to reply, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and without the slightest hesitation or diffidence, the heir of Seafern Hall ran into the room, and disregarding all previous conversation, plunged into the subject which had brought him there.

"Papa—nurse has just come from the village, and what do you think? Harry is drowned! You know Harry, he used to take me out to sea in his boat, and play with me and tell me tales about sharks—it's too bad, there's nobody left to play with me."

"Some of the other fishermen will play with you," suggested Mr. Fenwood, who could bear any calamity, better than the knowledge that his boy was in trouble.

"No they can't," was the confident rejoinder, "they're stupid old men, and they talk broad, so that you don't know what they mean. What are you going to do?"

The problem was not an easy one; but the child having stated it, waited for its solution as a

matter of course. He had never questioned the fact that his small portion of the world was to be made uniformly agreeable to him, and therefore he was surprised to find something unpleasant occurring, without grown-up people taking measures to prevent it. Mr. Fenwood seemed perplexed, his own theories were quite in accordance with his boy's instinctive ideas, but what could he do? He could not give the old sailors the required vivacity, or effect an alteration in their style of speech; and the idea of thwarting these imperative demands for amusement, never occurred to him. Mr. Ellis saw an opportunity of enforcing his original purpose, strengthened by this unexpected ally.

"I am sorry you have lost your play-fellow, Percy," he said, "but you must not forget that many people have no one to play with them. Do you remember Harry's little girl?"

"Yes; I saw her in the cottage."

"Well, she is very lonely and sad, her father is dead, as you know, and her mother has gone to live with him in that beautiful country beyond the sky, I told you about last Sunday."

“Are there any boats there?” inquired Percy, evidently thinking his old companion would be ill at ease in any sphere not allowing free play to his nautical abilities.

Mr. Ellis evaded the question, not seeing very clearly whither theological conjecture of this kind would lead him, and continued—

“They are happy, but little Alice is very sad. Are you not sorry for her?”

The boy’s face clouded with the quick sympathy of a child.

“Of course, I’m sorry for her,” he said, “but I’m sorry for myself too.”

He had stated his thoughts with more accuracy than is common among metaphysicians, whose life-long occupation is to analyse feeling and motive. He *was* sorry for the little girl, but the question concerning his own happiness had not been satisfactorily answered, and after all this was the more important subject of the two. Childish sorrow however, can almost always be healed; it is only in after years that we receive cureless wounds, destined to throb continually with undiminished pain.

After he had stood considering the matter some minutes, the boy's face suddenly brightened, and he laughed triumphantly.

"Let her come and live here papa," he exclaimed. "Then we can play with each other. It's a pity she's a girl," (the last reflection was uttered in a tone of patronising forbearance) "for girls can't throw stones, and they cry when they're hurt, but it can't be helped. You will let her come papa, won't you?"

"I will think of it Percy," said his father, "go into the nursery now, and we will talk again about this by-and-by."

The boy obeyed more readily than was his custom, and when they were again alone together, Mr. Ellis said—

"Percy is right—he must have a companion—solitude is unnatural at his age. If you give him what he asks, he will be happier for it, and better too."

"If I really thought that, there is no sacrifice I would refuse to make."

"I know it; but in this case there is really no sacrifice necessary. All that you have to do, is to

let the child share Percy's play, and work if he has any, to spend a little money upon her, and to let her sleep in one of the many empty rooms in this great house. It means no change in your style of life, no disturbance of your quiet."

"But the charge of a child means anxiety and"—

"You will not grudge her a little kindly care. By-and-by, when Percy goes to school, you will be lonely yourself; and glad to have something bright and young always near you."

The last consideration was evidently a new one to Mr. Fenwood, and not without weight. After a few minutes' reflection, he said—

"There is something in what you say, but of course I cannot give you an immediate reply. Where is the child?"

"At my house."

"Then I will call there this evening, and let you know my decision."

Here the conversation ended, and with an apology for the length of his visit, Mr. Ellis left the house.

He had little doubt concerning the nature of

the postponed decision, for Mr. Fenwood having once recognised that anything would add to his boy's happiness, would have mortgaged his estates to obtain it. His mission had succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes, and little Alice was virtually provided for; yet he hardly knew whether to be glad of this or to regret it.

He could not have explained this inconsistency, nor would it have been easy to separate analytically the varying motives from which it sprang. Was wealth always better than poverty, he thought, as he looked at the neglected dreariness of Seafern Hall—had he done right in leading there a child, who might find it a prison rather than a home?

The thought was only a shadowy one, but it troubled him. Many other fancies and awakened memories were haunting him, and he longed to read the future, and see the remote effects of the words he had spoken that morning.

But it is vain to strain the eyes by gazing into the darkness of futurity, though half our life is in shadow; and work once completed, ceases to be wholly ours.

CHAPTER IV.

"The structure had forty doors, all open, each of which was an entrance into a sort of treasury, containing more riches than many kingdoms."

ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS.

MR. FENWOOD kept his promise and called at the Vicarage that evening, greatly to the surprise of Mary, who had never ushered him into her master's presence before. Visitors were no rarity there (a fact of which she was discontentedly conscious), for George Ellis kept open house, and every parishioner in trouble, or in love—every young fellow who thought of buying a boat, or introducing any change in his manner of life—every matron whose son "went wrong," and every maiden whose lover was roughly treated, came to him as a matter of course; but Mr. Fenwood had hitherto defeated all attempts to call him from his hermitage.

After the ordinary words of greeting, Mr. Fenwood said—

"I have been thinking of what you were say-

ing this morning, and for Percy's sake I am disposed to give your little friend a home. She is in bed now, I suppose?"

"Yes; would you like to see her?"

"If you think we shall not wake her."

The question being too abstruse for a bachelor's decision, Mr. Ellis rang for Mary, who was his court of final appeal in emergencies of this kind. The oracle on being consulted, not only giving a favourable reply, but lighting a candle to show the way they followed her into the room where the child lay sleeping. The two men stood silently by the bed for some minutes, then they returned to the adjoining room.

"She is a pretty child," said Mr. Fenwood, "I suppose there is little more to be arranged?"

"You have decided then?"

"I have."

"When shall she come to you?"

"I will send for her to-morrow, if you like."

"So soon! well, it is better so I suppose. She shall be ready."

Thus the matter was settled, and after a few unimportant remarks they parted.

The carriage was duly sent, greatly to the surprise of the few villagers who saw it waiting outside the Vicarage, for like certain ancient statutes, it was impressive, cumbrous, and very rarely used. Little Alice whose ideas of conveyances were limited to boats, viewed the stately vehicle at first with suspicion; but at length yielding to persuasion, she entered it and was driven to the great Hall. There after confiding her to the care of the housekeeper, Mr. Ellis left her.

"I hope it's all for the best," he thought, as he walked home alone. "She will have everything that money can buy now, for Fenwood is rich and generous, I wish there were a little more life in him."

He paused, sailor-like, in his reflections, to watch the flight of some distant birds across the sea; then he resumed—

"Perhaps if I had economised a little more, and given away a little less, I might have kept the child myself, Harry's death seems to have taken half the interest of life away—after all it's a dreary thing to be always alone."

But one of the fishermen coming up at this

moment, with a tale about his sick wife, and poor success, Mr. Ellis's purse never very full, grew lighter—and his heart too, for there is no consoler to the large-hearted like the sense of power to comfort others. So without giving the man time to thank him, the clergyman promised to call at his cottage soon, and with a word of cheery prophecy touching the improvement of the fishing season, went once more into his house; and finished with much misgiving and self-mistrust, his interrupted sermon.

Meanwhile little Alice was gazing with unfeigned astonishment at the glories of Seafern Hall. To her it all seemed dazzling and wonderful; her mother had once told her a fairy tale about a beautiful princess whose wealth was boundless; and she immediately inferred that the enchanted palace must have looked like this.

The room to which the housekeeper had brought her, was large and lofty; the furniture handsome, though old-fashioned. It was the most cheerful room in the house, for it was the least neglected, and dwellings whether squalid or palatial are like men and women in this—that they need song

and laughter to render them tolerable. Grandeur is apt to be chilly, and many people would have preferred the warmth and brightness of the little sitting-room in Harry Easton's cottage, which always seemed complete when he and his fair young wife were there.

But Alice had not learned to criticise, and her imagination was unequal to the task of conceiving anything surpassing what she saw. Childhood has few possessions more to be envied than its powers of unqualified appreciation; if instead of weakly copying their elders—of uttering emotions they have never felt, and sorrows they have never known, while their hearts are beating gaily with unshadowed hope, the clever children who write verses, would tell what they really think and feel, their writings might not be worthless after all. Faultless rhythm and artistic consistency might still be lacking; but it would surely be a deep relief sometimes, to turn from teachers who are hopeless and weary in their wisdom, to listen to the sweet young voices telling us to believe that beauty can never die, and bidding us be happy because the world is fair.

But be this as it may, Alice thought herself in a land of surpassing loveliness, and when the old housekeeper left her alone in this wonderful room for a few minutes, the beauty had in it an element of terror. The grand piano was an object inexplicably mysterious—the chairs and tables seemed massively majestic—she could not feel certain whether the birds with gaudy plumage in a high case, were alive or not, and she was afraid of the cold eyes of a defunct Fenwood, who frowned gloomily upon her from the wall. There was a weird fascination for her in the old painting, so unlike anything she had ever seen before; and although she did not think it probable that this strangely dressed gentleman, would step from his frame and demand why his solitude was broken in upon by little girls, there was something so life-like in his piercing scrutiny, that it vaguely frightened her.

But most of all she marvelled at the mirrors of which there were four in the room. Could it be possible that they had anything in common with the little hanging glass, by means of which her mother used to dress her hair? It had been

unequal to the task of producing the whole face at once, and like many old people, its reflective faculties had been impaired by age. But here, Alice could see the room—the quaint old furniture—the terrible painting—the glittering books—the birds of doubtful vitality—two or three marble busts (which she regarded as the effigies of very wicked people, seeing that their heads had been severed from their bodies), and a little girl with brown curling hair, who was gazing with wondering eyes at all the magnificence, and closely clasping the decapitated doll already alluded to.

She sat very quietly for some minutes, thinking in childish fashion—vaguely and with no traceable sequence of ideas—about all this; then finding that nobody came, she slowly approached the mirror and timidly touched it with her hand.

She was surprised to hear a peal of laughter, and turning round, saw it came from a boy about two years older than herself, with blue eyes, and fair hair which fell in graceful negligence upon his black velvet jacket.

“What are you laughing at?” she said, with a child’s quick resentment of ridicule.

"I'm laughing at you," said Percy Fenwood, who had come into the room by a different door to the one by which she had entered, "what a baby you must be to play with your own face in a looking-glass."

"I'm not a baby," she retorted angrily, her natural courage returning to her; a smaller indignity she might have endured from him with patience, for he was splendidly dressed she thought, besides being taller than she, and quite at home in fairyland. But after all, the soul is greater than its surroundings, and when one has lived five years in the world, it is painful and humiliating to be called a baby.

"You must be," returned Percy, in a tone of conscious mental superiority, "only babies play with looking-glasses and broken dolls."

Not being equal at that moment to a controversy based on general principles, Alice made no reply, but clasped the calumniated object of her affections closer to her heart, and determined to offer fierce resistance if any attempts were made to deprive her of it.

There was no present demand on her heroism

however, for Percy, believing that his last proposition was unanswerable, began to feel the generosity of a conqueror, and said in a tone of friendly patronage—

“If you’ll come into the nursery, I’ll show you something sensible to play with.”

Alice complied readily, wondering what new marvels the enchanted palace contained. Percy led her into the room triumphantly, for this was his own peculiar territory where he reigned supreme, and he was anxious to see what she would think of it. At first she was disappointed, but a closer observation convinced her that here too, were treasures of which the outer world never dreamed. There was the model of a ship, with masts and sails like the vessels she had watched far out at sea, but grander and more beautiful she thought, with brighter paint, and whiter canvas. Heaped in an untidy litter on floor and table, were many handsome toys, and gaily bound picture books. But at the other end of the room, was a transcendent glory, beside which paintings and puzzles, bricks and balls, faded into insignificance.

"What is that?" she cried, pointing to a large rocking-horse.

"Come and see," said Percy, mischievously. When the prince in the Arabian story, opened the golden door, which he had promised his fair hostesses never to touch, and saw the winged horse in his perfumed stable, his admiration could scarcely have exceeded that of little Alice, at beholding this undreamt-of miracle in wood.

"Would you like to have a ride?" said Percy, "if you would I'd rock it for you."

This sounded benevolent and unselfish, but was in reality a plan to further establish his theory of her infant-like character, and his own comparatively mature age.

Alice at once consented, and Percy proffered with evident alacrity his unnecessary assistance. From an easy swinging motion, the rocking-horse gradually entered by his direction, into an unsteady canter, then into a wild erratic gallop. It began to stagger—to make purposeless plunges—to swerve from its wonted course, and to evince general symptoms of equine intoxication. But the attempt to frighten the little rider failed ut-

terly ; as the movement of the horse became more rapid, her colour heightened and she grew very excited, but this sprang not from fear, but delight. Percy, who like most philosophers, required the repetition of proof before he would abandon a theory, urged the submissive steed to fresh exertions. But Alice, not in the least frightened, began to sing a ballad that had been a favourite with her father, about a horseman riding through a lonely wood. It was clear that she was not to be alarmed, so Percy gave a desperate jerk by way of final endeavour, which had the effect of ending the song, and throwing both horse and rider to the ground.

“Are you much hurt?” inquired Percy gently, after extricating her with some difficulty from the prostrate animal’s legs.

“Yes,” replied Alice with laconic candour. There were tears in her eyes, but she had not forgotten that he had called her a baby, and was too proud to let them fall.

“You’re crying,” said Percy, endeavouring to recover the dignity which he felt had been slightly impaired by his last achievement.

"I'm not," she answered, with more virtuous indignation than strict veracity; and the noble steed being erect once more, she climbed into the saddle and resumed her ride, singing to herself in a low voice the ballad about the horseman in the forest all the while.

Percy could not help admiring her courage, and after he had stood watching her for a few minutes, he said in a conciliatory tone,

"What's your name?"

"Alice."

"Well, I'm sorry I hurt you, Alice, and I'm sorry I called you a baby; you're different to other girls, and I like you."

Not receiving an immediate reply, he continued—

"So you needn't be afraid of anything, I mean always to take care of you."

Whether Alice realized the full value of this promised protection so modestly conferred, may be considered doubtful, but she was glad that he was pleased, and the moment having arrived when tragic disdain (which is apt to become fatiguing if too long sustained) might with dignity be laid aside, she sat by her late opponent, while he

showed her all his playthings. This was an occupation delightful to them both, for Percy felt that by the display of knowledge his superiority became less doubtful, and Alice gave to every object the unqualified admiration of an enthusiast.

So when Mr. Fenwood saw the children together later in the day, he was satisfied that he had done well in giving the orphan girl a home. The action was itself kind and generous, and perhaps as Mr. Ellis had suggested, Alice might be a comfort to him some day when he sorely needed companionship; but at any rate his boy was pleased, and this was the central idea of his lonely and otherwise purposeless life. For this end the sunshine illumined the dreary rooms, and the moonbeams clothed the trees in the Park with silver—for no other object were performed the silent operations of nature, and the noisy work of men.

CHAPTER V.

Then all things look strange in the pure golden æther ;
We walk through the gardens with hands linked together,
 And the lilies look large as the trees ;
And as loud as the birds sing the bloom-loving bees,
And the birds sing like angels, so mystical-fine,
And the cedars are brushing the archangels' feet,
And time is eternity, love is divine,
 And the world is complete.

E. B. BROWNING.

If the cliffs at Seafern, touched with unwonted compassion, had by the opening of a secret door, offered little Alice Easton a home in an enchanted cavern, it would scarcely have surprised the villagers more than that shelter should be given her in Seafern Hall.

The inaccessible has always a strong element of mystery in it, and they had come to regard the ruinous building with simple veneration and superstitious fear. That a child whom they all knew, should have entered the magic circle to dwell there, as though "to the manner born," was a theme of wonder requiring frequent discussion

over pints of ale and profound meditation, assisted by clouds of tobacco smoke.

Of course there were many shades of opinion—many conflicting theories as to causes which had led to this, and many contradictory prophecies touching the future; but on the whole they were heartily glad of it, a few grumbled to the effect that Harry's luck had always been good, whatever he tried for, and here was a rare stroke of fortune falling to his child; such things never came to them—a conclusive proof that merit rarely gained its just reward. But these discontented critics were in a minority, though had the fishermen been more enlightened their number would probably have been greater. Envy is thoroughly cosmopolitan, and unconfined to any period of time, or class of society; but though they have more in common than either dreams, there is deeper malice and more utter poverty of soul in the artist's candid opinion of his companion's work, than in the village girl's disparagement of a pretty rival's bonnet.

Among the servants at the Hall opinion was also divided; the newer ones, in whom memories of

London were fresh, being glad of any change which promised to relieve however slightly, the general dulness of the place ; while the old family retainers, with the exception of the housekeeper, viewed with prejudice the elevation of this diminutive plebeian to the dignity of patrician rank.

And Alice—quite unconscious of being the theme of sympathy, criticism, or envy, soon grew used to the wonder of her new home, and began to grow weary of the stately quiet which surrounded her. The impressive character of material objects lies often only in novelty. In the same way that modern thought only regards the sun as a light whereby to make money, the child no longer considered the drawing-room a sacred place, but associated it merely with the more fruitful nursery which could be reached by passing through it.

It was natural that it should be so ; who lingers long in a temple after the gods are dead ? Such constancy, rare among men, is unknown to children, where the life consists not in remembrance, but in hope.

And to the imagination of the child who had gazed in reverent admiration at painting and

mirror, the gods *were* dead. The mirrors were only big looking-glasses after all ; the birds in the glass case had bright feathers, but they never moved and could not sing ; while even the terrible portrait, frowning just the same on every one else, without ever carrying his menace into action, became of no more practical consequence than the stern faces which her fancy used to see in the morning clouds. Moreover, for several days after Alice's introduction to the Hall, the rain fell with steady persistency, and made any excursion out of doors impossible. There could have been no more certain method of depressing her spirits, for fresh air and sunshine were vital necessities to the fisherman's child, accustomed to venturesome climbing of hill and cliff, and long daily rambles by the sea. This simple joy in the loveliness of nature, may be incomprehensible to those who are accustomed to associate such enthusiasm with the artistic nonsense of æsthetic cant ; but Alice had learnt it unconsciously from the many-coloured glories of the sunset, and the restless splendour of the waves. So when she woke every morning to find the sky still hidden by heavy rain clouds, everything

seemed sad and dreary to her. She slept in a finer bed than she had been accustomed to at home, but she missed her father's ringing laugh, and the gentle voice with which her mother used to wake her in the morning, with the glad news that the sun had risen, and the birds were singing their invitation to happy play. Alice knew nothing about analysis of feeling, and could have expressed none of these thoughts, except perhaps, that she was tired of being indoors, and watching the pelting rain; but the sensations were real notwithstanding, and even the arrival of a seamstress from an adjacent town to measure her for dresses of a beauty hitherto undreamt of, failed utterly to beguile her from her tears. This is worthy of note, for whatever may be the cause, it is an undeniable fact that while small boys claim respect by the recital of desperate adventures, and the display of blood-curdling knives, little girls invariably descant of feathers or ribbons.

Percy watched Alice's frequent tears with feelings quite the reverse of sympathetic; and was several times inclined to withdraw the favourable opinion he had originally formed of her.

"All girls are stupid," he remarked one day, sententiously, when she had refused to come and play with him, "and they're always crying about something or other. What's the matter now?"

"Everything's horrid," had been the brief reply, and Percy had temporarily abandoned all hope for her sex, as a race of beings beyond the reach of intellectual succour.

But at last the rain ceased, and with the first gleam of sunshine Alice's gaiety returned.

"What a strange girl you are," said Percy, watching her excitement as she sat at the window looking at the grounds around the Hall, with the universal radiance reflected in her eyes. "Yesterday you were crying like a baby, and to-day you're as wild as you can be."

She only laughed in the luxury—so rare in after years—of being perfectly happy, and permission having been granted, they set off for the beach without further delay. With the same amiable design that had prompted him to urge the rocking-horse into the performance of unnatural leaps, Percy took the roughest road and the steepest ascents, but once more he failed in his attempt to

assert masculine superiority, for Alice could climb far better than he, and in her insensibility to danger, walked so near the edge of the cliff that he begged her to be more prudent, frankly owning that she frightened him. This Alice at length consented to do, having redeemed her honour by sweeping away the fatal imputation of infancy that had been cast upon it.

Moreover when they reached the beach, she gained new distinction in Percy's eyes, for she knew exactly where the rarest shells and the prettiest seaweed were to be found; and finally she attained the crowning glory of discovering a cave which seemed to have been hollowed for no other purpose than play—where the world of mortals was shut out, and the echoes of word and laughter were like the songs of fairyland; where pebbles seemed smoother and shells daintier in their exquisite tracery than in other places—a retreat from which the sea and sky looked fairer than they had ever seemed before, as the faces of old friends gain new beauty when they are softened by sympathy or strengthened by belief.

The children said nothing of all this, and were

only vaguely conscious of unusual feeling, but they saw that it was very beautiful; and agreed that it should be their constant playground. In proof of this, Percy carved both their names on the cliff in large irregular capitals—a proceeding which Alice viewed with great admiration; and the nurse (who being neither youthful nor slender, had been only just able to keep the children in sight at a distance sufficiently remote to render her absolutely useless) informed them that it was time to go home. Having laughed in a very unsympathetic manner at her breathless avowal that they had “worried her out of her senses by their venturesomeness,” they consented; and returned drenched with sea-spray, and with clothes decidedly the worse for the morning expedition, but very well contented with themselves and each other.

Through rambles like this the companionship between the two children became daily closer, while the sense of class distinction rapidly faded away. They quarrelled sometimes, for Percy was often overbearing, and Alice frequently passionate; but each was a necessity to the other in that lonely

place, and in childhood affection needs no deeper root than this.

Moreover, like patriotic statesmen, who forgetting for a moment the factiousness of party, and the egotism of rivalry, unite with their opponents against a common enemy, they were soon agreeing to support each other in waging deadly war against a dreaded foe.

This adversary was a governess, who came to live at Seafern Hall, and to whose care the children were confided. Hitherto Mr. Fenwood had himself undertaken his boy's education, and as the studies had been desultory and erratic, and as the smallest proficiency never failed to be rewarded, Percy had not regarded these intellectual pursuits as open to objection; it was one thing to read out of gaily illustrated books, to write what were facetiously termed "copies" (probably because they resembled nothing at all), and to skirmish feebly with the multiplication table; but it was quite another to be menaced with systematic teaching. This meant the renunciation of liberty, and the death of ease. Percy hated trouble, and Alice liked nothing so well as climb-

ing the steepest path of the cliff, or racing by the waves, and challenging the spray to drench her; therefore they were prepared to regard all that related to this tyranny with the same hatred which the outlaws of "the merry greenwood" felt for the machinery of government, and the pageantry of courts.

So hostilities were meditated before Miss Gordon's arrival, and after the first lesson they were all but openly declared; though it soon became evident that the utmost the allied forces could hope to accomplish, was to harass and disturb the composure of the enemy; whose formidable character made more brilliant achievements impossible.

A few words descriptive of the guide who was to lead the children into the promised land of knowledge, are necessary here. Miss Gordon (for although her godfather and godmothers had given her at the time of her baptism the name of Sarah, the use of that name was for ever forbidden to the profane lips of manhood) was not more than six or seven-and-twenty—although of masculine rather than feminine height, and spare withal,

she would notwithstanding have been rather good-looking if her face had possessed any animation. This however was wholly lacking, not from shallowness of mind, but from long habits of self-repression. Whether the heart thus constantly hidden was sensitive or sympathetic, it was difficult at first sight to determine: probably not invariably so, for mental and moral constitutions are undermined, quite as inevitably as the physical organism, if too carefully guarded from fresh air.

It was not to be supposed that Miss Gordon was a feminine ogre, devoid of all gentle feeling and kindly thought. On the contrary; the story of her lonely life was redeemed by many an act of uncomplaining endurance and silent sacrifice. When her mother died, her cold blue eyes had shed no tear, but they had also been calm and unwearied through long and patient watching. The skill which she had acquired through that ceaseless ministry would again have been freely at the disposal of any one who had a claim upon her.

This must be admitted in common justice; but one does not always require a nurse, and may

therefore be pardoned for preferring a companion whose eyes can brighten, and whose lips can smile, who is not ashamed to betray strong feeling—to whom a pet name may be given without dread or remorse.

In some legends, spectres carry with them the warmth of an infernal atmosphere ; by the inversion of the same principle, Miss Gordon's presence was suggestive of icefields, and endless drifts of snow. The moral temperature at Seafern Hall had never been high, but after Miss Gordon's entrance, it fell steadily until it reached zero, where it henceforth remained.

Study under such auspices is not apt to be fascinating ; and both Percy and Alice found it unspeakably dull. They were neither of them deficient in ability, and if they had seen fit to devote half the ingenuity with which they evaded lessons to the mastery of them, Miss Gordon would have had no cause to complain of her pupils ; but as it was, forgetfulness was rapid and progress slow. Sometimes in the earlier days of this tuition, an exceptional event would move them to an occasional display of affection, but

these demonstrative proceedings were always checked as folly by the teacher; and in a short time they came to regard books as stupid things, and Miss Gordon as one of the ills which flesh is heir to.

Fortunately the sea and sky remained unchanged, and whenever by any pretext, books could be thrown aside, the children gladly escaped from prison to wander along the sandy beach, and talk together in the fairy cave which Alice's bright eyes had discovered.

And so with little variation of events to distinguish one day from another, three years passed away. In the great world they witnessed strange and violent changes in the lives of men. Much was forgotten, and more ignored—in great cities men wore out every faculty that makes life worth having in the pursuit of gold; and on lonely battle-fields they died silently for causes of which they knew as little as the trampled grass on which they fell. Thus with tears and laughter—with golden dream pictures, and in characters of blood—while men loved and hated, struggled with high aims to grapple with the problems of existence,

or by base intrigues made the darkness denser, three more pages were completed in the great diary of the world.

Perhaps if hearts were laid bare, the history of Seafern was not wholly different after all; for Tom's recognition that Jennie had eyes it was pleasant to watch, had at least something in common with the rhythmic words of chivalrous devotion whispered in gaily lighted ball-rooms to ladies of high degree, and perhaps a parallel might be drawn between Dick Gubbles who declared that his stalest fish were above reproach, and one or two right honourable statesmen who defended their political proceedings with the same enthusiasm, and a veracity almost as exact.

But outwardly there was little change—a few more cottages were built—a few more maidens had become brides—some old familiar faces were seen no longer in the village, having passed from their daily occupations to face peril in distant seas, or to rest in the unbroken stillness of the quiet churchyard.

The simple-hearted clergyman worked manfully as before—Mr. Fenwood lived among his

books with no interest in the outer world except his boy—Miss Gordon defended from the approach of humanity by unseen barriers of ice, dwelt in Seafern Hall serenely content with exclusion; while Percy and Alice finding comfort in companionship, became in spite of occasional quarrels, fonder of each other every day.

And so for three years the soft grass grew on the humble grave, where Harry Easton and the woman he had loved so well were sleeping side by side.

CHAPTER VI.

Life's work of disenchantment begins early ; we soon discover that beauty is transient—that the world outside our nursery is a rough playfellow—that the fairies of a Christmas pantomime exert small influence in the affairs of men ; but childhood retains its happiness by virtue of its illogical faith ; it finds one fair dream to be a mirage, but presses forward with unshaken confidence towards the yet more delusive vision of the future. Only when we are alone and weary—when ambition has been mocked by failure, friendship wronged by treachery, and love made desolate by death—is the full meaning of the dreary lesson learnt.

It was Saturday morning and Alice was in high spirits, for this was the weekly holiday, and the sunshine (which had been positively aggravating for the last two or three days, lighting up the hideous facts of dingy lesson books, blotted exercises, and chaotic copies) became a genial playfellow as it fell on wave and tree with the transforming touch of Midas.

It was believed by the children that the sense of partially abdicated authority, and the diminished power of torture, gave Miss Gordon much bitterness of spirit, a conviction which materially heightened the enjoyment of freedom ; but that

lady (in whom three years had wrought no perceptible change beyond the hardening of old characteristics) made no sign of unusual feeling. Her habit was to take a book (she was particularly fond of controversial theology and arctic travels—a comprehensiveness of taste embracing the torrid and frigid zones) and leave her pupils to make the most of their brief escape from thralldom.

On the present occasion there was a sense of importance about Percy which puzzled Alice not a little. As a rule he rejoiced in these seasons of liberty as freely as she did, but this morning the dignity of a great secret restrained him.

“I’ve something to tell you, Alice,” he said, as soon as permission had been granted to the children to go out; “if you’ll come with me to the cave I’ll let you know what it is.”

“The cave’s too far off,” said Alice, with feminine curiosity and masculine impatience; “we can talk just as well on the cliff.”

Percy graciously consented to this, and they ran off to the spot in question at once, feigning not to hear a remark of Miss Gordon’s touching the gross impropriety of unseemly haste.

In the judgment of a child, a secret is as precious a possession as a gold mine, and a spring morning, when the sunshine gained a new lustre from the temporary abandonment of such dull tyrannies as books and pens, was pre-eminently the time for confidence.

“What is it, Percy?” said Alice breathlessly, when they had found a soft carpet of grass and clover very near the edge of the cliff.

Percy looked deliberately at the face of his little companion, and then gazed steadfastly at a fishing boat far out at sea, but made no reply. Alice’s flushed cheeks, eager brown eyes, and waving wealth of disordered chestnut hair, were worth very earnest contemplation, and the tremulous light on the brown sail was an artistic study, but Percy was not accustomed to indulge in reflections of this kind, and was merely silent that his postponed confidence might thereby gain greater weight.

“What a stupid boy you are!” said Alice. “You said you wanted to tell me something, and now I’m ready to hear it you won’t talk.”

“I’m going to talk directly,” returned Percy,

with provoking calmness. "Don't be in a hurry."

By way of practically enforcing this advice, he threw a stone at some distant birds, tore up a handful of grass and examined it minutely, as though suddenly inspired with botanical interest, and then, no other occupation offering itself, said slowly—

"My father was talking to me alone in his study this morning."

"I know that," cried Alice, impatiently. "What did he say?"

"That I am too old to stay at home any longer, and that I am to go to school next week."

Poor Alice! She had expected great things from the disclosure of this wonderful secret, and now felt something more than mere disappointment.

A moment before the sunlight had been an atmosphere of happiness, and the waves a host of laughing playfellows clad in blue and gold; now the sky seemed dull and cloudy, and the sea only a waste of leaden waters, breaking on the beach with a wearisome sound of monotonous complaint. In spite of the efforts she made to appear indif-

ferent, two large tears dimmed for a moment her wistful eyes, and then rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Are you glad to go?" she said at last, hastily brushing them away.

"Of course I am," was the immediate rejoinder. "I'm tired of this place, where there's nothing to look at but the sea, and no one to talk to but you. At school there'll be no end of boys, and cricket, and football, and leapfrog, and suppers in bed, and all kinds of jolly things. Lessons 'll be some fun then, not the stupid affairs they are with Miss Gordon."

"I wish I were a boy," said Alice, sorrowfully. Here, indeed was a land of promise—a world of realized ideals; but alas! its sacred fields could never be trodden by feminine feet.

"I wish you were," said Percy, in a tone of sympathy, "but it can't be helped." And with this philosophic recognition of the inevitable, he resumed his interrupted discourse on the glories of school. There would be so many new things to see and to enjoy, that every day would have its gay career of pleasure, excitement, and adventure;

for he had recently read with delighted interest a tale of schoolboy exploits, and his mind was full of confused anticipations touching cricket matches, fights, and the excursions of marauding parties, whose achievements would perhaps be deepened into tragedy by a final "barring-out." At length being out of breath he paused, and discovered to his surprise that Alice was crying.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, in no very sympathetic tone. Tears in his judgment, were always objectionable, but they became doubly so when his own sense of enjoyment laid necessity upon everyone else to be in high spirits too.

"You don't think about me at all," said his little companion reproachfully, "What am I to do when you're gone? There'll be no one to talk to and play with, and Miss Gordon's always disagreeable."

"That's true," remarked Percy, with judicial impartiality.

"Of course it is," returned Alice, impatiently. "I hate her—she's a regular refrigerator."

"What's that?" inquired the boy in some surprise, for Alice's usual diction was not at all Johnsonian in character.

"I had it in my spelling lesson yesterday," replied Alice, smiling through her tears at the recollection, "and I asked her what it meant, and she said 'a box for keeping things cool,' and I thought to myself 'That's just what you are,' and she is. When she speaks to me I feel as if I was being frozen."

"I don't think that's grammar," said Percy, who had the day before undergone protracted torture in studying the vagaries of verbs in the subjunctive mood.

"I don't care whether it is or not," retorted Alice, with an acute sense of the comparative insignificance of syntax in the presence of impending catastrophe; "you're going away, and everything will be horrid."

Percy was not at all disposed to support the claims of grammar, for he had suffered much aching of head and weariness of spirit in futile attempts to grasp fine verbal distinctions; and had experienced heavy defeat in battles with hostile armies of discordant phrases; but this melancholy tone of prophetic pessimism could more easily be grappled with.

"Everything horrid?" he echoed; "you always

say that if anything's the matter, it may be rather dull for you at first, but you'll soon get used to it, and there'll be no end of things to look forward to."

"What things?" said Alice, uncertain whether to listen to the voice of consolation or not.

"I shall write to you every week," returned Percy, with a self-approving sense of magnanimity, "and there'll be the holidays; and we shall soon be grown up, and then we'll get married, and live together in London you know, we agreed about that a year ago."

"Yes," said Alice doubtfully, feeling perhaps the contingency too remote for present comfort; "but perhaps you'll meet some other girl you'll like better."

"There *are* a lot of girls in London," mused Percy, with quiet enjoyment of the unquestioned power to select; "but I don't think I shall prefer them to you Alice—you see I've got used to you, and you're pretty, and—yes, I shall keep my promise—never fear."

This at all events was gratifying; for Alice's imagination was unequal to the effort of creating

a brighter Elysium, than life in the far-off mysterious brilliant London, with Percy for a constant companion—a life of liberty, in which grammar, geography and Miss Gordon, were alike forgotten, where the graves of the past were unmolested by inquisitive historians, and the multiplication table was regarded as an irrelevant impertinence.

Moreover Nature was in her brightest mood that morning, and Alice never could be sad long when the sun was shining, so she began to laugh with delighted anticipation of the holidays, before her tears were dry; and discussed the prospect with characteristic animation.

So the day came for Percy to leave home, which he did (it must be reluctantly confessed) with very little emotion, while the inmates of Seafern Hall viewed his departure with varying regard. Most of the servants were sorry to lose him, and the old housekeeper shed tears as perceptible as those of a barrister touched by the greatness of a client's wrongs; with perhaps a little more sincerity, than usually accompanies these displays of legal grief. Miss Gordon was really sorry to lose a pupil of whom in spite of his troublesome ways, she was

secretly fond ; but it being her custom to hide all traces of affection, as criminals bury the fatal evidences of their guilt, she maintained an aspect of absolute indifference. Mr. Fenwood who had for some days past been unusually restless and irritable at the prospect of the coming separation, went with his boy to London, and little Alice with a choking sensation in her throat, and an angry loneliness in her heart—with dishevelled hair, and cheeks flushed by tear-removing friction, tried Miss Gordon's serenity by more mistakes than a statesman out of office ever accused a ministerial rival of committing.

Percy's letters which it is needless to say, were irregular from the first, did not fulfil her anticipations ; for like Rasselas, he began to find that the world so bright when viewed from his native valley, left much to be desired. To his father he wrote briefly, carefully, and in the stereotyped phrases of dutiful boyhood ; but to Alice he unfolded all the secrets of his prison house. On torn scraps of paper, scrawled in large untidy characters, made chaotic by flourishes and illegible by blots, he wrote of the misery and discomfort of the school.

These letters need not be given here, though they were often in Alice's hands, and almost always in her thoughts. In the well-nigh infinite possibilities of human character, there may have been boys who never grumbled at the school fare; or chafed at the restrictions of discipline; but this state of mind is utterly opposed to precedent or rule. But Percy's letters went beyond all this—Alice's bright eyes flashed indignantly, and she clenched her little hand in anger, as she read of a tyrant schoolfellow, bearing the ill-omened name of Mudson who made life a grievous burden by the despotic character of his yoke.

This was hard indeed to bear, it was not enough to be harassed by Latin verbs—to grow faint of heart at beholding a long vista of unknown arithmetical rules—to eat thick bread with only an obscure suggestion of butter—it was not even enough to incur the dread penalty of the cane; but this lawless oppression made day wearisome by fagging; and night sorrowful by application of a leathern strap.

Nor was even this all; the insatiable Mudson demanded tangible proofs of fealty, a fact which

Percy recorded in a phrase whose laconic force may perhaps atone for its lack of grace—"he bones our pocket money, and cribs our cakes."

But the triumph of tyranny is not for ever. Soon there came a letter exulting over the malignant Mudson's downfall, and loudly praising the valour and prowess of his conqueror. Percy described the sanguinary battle with Homeric animation, and minuteness of detail, and Alice whose imagination was very strong, followed every incident with excited interest. No reader of Shakespeare ever beheld in fancy the brave young king and his wearied soldiers on the eve of Agincourt, so clearly as Alice saw that dire revolt against a formidable adversary. "You see" (so ran the letter), "Mayfield's only two years older than I am, and Mudson's an ugly beggar of sixteen—nearly six feet high"—(here Alice shuddered) "but Mayfield licked him all to fits." At this glorious consummation Alice laughed, clapped her hands, upset an ink bottle over a new copy book in her excitement, and received her sentence of punishment with the fortitude of heroes who have

smiled on the rack, and bathed their hands in flame, to prove the impotence of torture.

But the new era of peace was not in reality a cause for unqualified satisfaction, at least so far as Alice was concerned. While Percy was in trouble, he was glad enough to confide in his old playmate ; but as he began to make friends at the school, and to discover that his new life though not the roseate thing he had expected, was not so utterly dismal as he had at first supposed ; the gulf between himself and Alice widened, his letters became shorter and less frequent, till she began to think he had forgotten her altogether.

Whether she would have forgotten him, had their positions been reversed, is doubtful ; but situated as she was she would have found it impossible, if she actually wished to do so. Mr. Fenwood who now frequently made her his companion, talked of little else, while almost everything she did and everywhere she went, was directly or indirectly suggestive of the time they had spent together. In this, as in many other things, the life of childhood is strangely like the course of

after years ; for where two lives are parted, it generally happens that to one is opened a new arena of thought and activity, while to the other only the old scenes are left, robbed always of their beauty, and often of their hope.

Alice found the dreary loneliness very hard to bear, and would watch with wistful eyes the village children at the merry games, in which she was forbidden to take a part. The barefooted little creatures would have been greatly astonished if they had known that the little lady who wore such pretty dresses, and who lived at the never-to-be-sufficiently-reverenced Hall, envied them ; but she was beginning to learn only too well that the real inequalities of life are not the contrasts of wealth and poverty, but the deeper ones of hope and weariness—of loneliness and love.

The force of isolation is often diminished by the shadowy companionship of remembered days ; but this is of course unknown to the thoughtless activity of childhood, and Alice's spirits would probably have been crushed by the prevailing monotony if she had not found a friend to beguile her solitude.

This was the sailor who had carried her mother home to die. Datchby was growing old, and being a bachelor who had saved a little money, had no further occasion for rough work, but used to row out a little way to sea every day from old instincts only joining in bolder enterprise when inclined to do so.

After Percy left Seafern, Datchby came to be Alice's boatman whenever she could get permission to go with him; and in course of time, there sprang up a very singular affection between them. It was singular, because in station, in age, in character, and in life experience, they were utterly unlike; and yet it was thoroughly natural too. For the old childless man watched little Alice with a wondering admiration, in which many emotions poetical and superstitious, were unconsciously blended, while his little companion on the other hand, had enough of her father's spirit to exult in this gay battle with wave and breeze.

Nor was this the only ground of their friendship; for Alice would ask him all kinds of eager questions about her father and mother, and the old man would reply in his simple sailor fashion—

telling her how beautiful Grace was, and how good, and how Harry had not his equal in those parts.

"Ay, he was what ye might call a man," Datchby would say, shipping his oars, and letting the boat drift with the stream. "There's bold lads in the village—I won't gainsay that; but show me one of 'em who could row or swim like him, leave alone his being such a skollard."

Alice would utter some exclamation of interest, and the old man would resume—

"Then how he would sing! So bold, it did ye good to hear him. Many a lass in the village thought then as I do now, and a bit stronger, maybe. Well—well, there's good beneath all the evil, parson says, and I s'pose it be so; but it was a cruel night that cast Harry dead on the sands where I see ye a playin' this mornin', miss."

And then if he were in a talkative mood, Datchby would "spin yarns," as he called them of his own voyages, and the perils he had faced and battled with, in distant seas. Alice often regretted her sex when she listened to these stories, for although she had never heard of philosophic Radicalism, and did not know what a vote was, she

believed as firmly as the most advanced feminine politician that all the good things of life were the exclusive property of men; and to be a sailor she thought, was the most attractive of human ambitions: life on shore was so tame and monotonous, and the pain of its plodding pilgrimage was continually aggravated by books; but to float far away by lands where strange trees grew, and birds of unimagined hues nestled among the branches—to leave these and sail where nothing was visible but wave and sky—to feel the pulses quickened by the sense of danger—to battle with mad winds and desperate seas, and finally to return home and command respect by the recital of wild adventures, and the description of strange sights—this would be life indeed. But such triumphs could only be attained in dreams, and Alice found the loneliness of her actual life dull and oppressive. To love something is the fundamental necessity of a woman's nature, and is evident throughout her history; from the moment when her baby arms are thrown round a mother's neck, to the time when one figure of the far-off past is distinct amid the dimness of a receding world to dying eyes. But now that Percy

had gone to school, and Alice had no companion—there was constantly in her heart the sense of disappointment, and she envied the waves their fancied freedom, and the birds their continual change of scene.

CHAPTER VII.

When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green ;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen ;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away ;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

Among the many illustrations of the theory that results in life are rarely calculable, there are few more striking than the formation of friendships. Modern science has discovered much, but it has failed to throw the faintest light on the secret emotions of humanity ; probably when the world was young, men chose their wives and their confidential companions, quite regardless that they had nothing whatever in common with them, and when the earth, weary of long centuries of greed and wrong, is preparing for its final ruin, it seems likely they will be little wiser.

In schoolboy life, there is often a parallel to the

great world outside the playground walls; and it frequently happens that a close companionship between widely different natures, rests upon a slight basis, such as fellowship in the chosen eleven of a cricket club, or the enforced acquaintance of study (or the evasion of it) in the same class.

This being so, it was not strange that after the heroic battle with the despotic Mudson, which has been already recorded, Percy should swear eternal fealty to his deliverer, or that Sydney Mayfield, on his part, should undertake the office of continual protector. Schoolboy attachments, like all things having a slight foundation, are apt to be transient: but in this case, the friendship constantly strengthened as the months passed by, and it soon came to be accepted as a rule throughout the school, that the adhesion of Mayfield to any scheme having been promised, the co-operation of Fenwood might be relied on as a matter of course.

Percy gained from this companionship in every way: to be in the confidence of a boy two years his senior, was itself a dignity, but there was a material harvest to be reaped, as well as the mere

straw of social reputation. Muscular prestige once gained at school, has rarely to be reasserted ; and no one cared to molest Percy, now that the certain result was a fight with his sturdy companion. Moreover the elder boy frequently helped the younger in his lessons, thereby averting penalties and enlarging the time for agreeable leisure. Thus gratitude and the sense of self-interest were the chief elements of Percy's constantly avowed affection, though he would have been very indignant at such a description of it. It would have been far harder to analyse the feelings with which Sydney regarded his fair-haired, blue-eyed companion. Percy was always insulted at the faintest imputation of girlishness, but there was a feminine beauty and softness in his face ; and as he grew older it became apparent that this was not wholly false as an indication of character. This may have partly accounted for the patient tenderness which Sydney Mayfield felt for one who in strength, in intellect, in energy, and in disposition was far inferior to himself ; or it may have sprung merely from the well-known tendency of a strong affectionate nature to love all

that it has benefited and befriended. But whatever may have been the cause, it is certain that the feelings thus awakened were deep, true, and even romantic in their nature—destined to endure for years, and if ever crushed by unfriendly circumstances, to be still silently powerful as a remembrance.

The former event they confidently anticipated, the possibility of the latter contingency never occurring to them. Their paths in the school life diverged widely—Mayfield rising in course of time to the dignity of head boy, and also covering himself with glory as captain of the cricket club; while Percy on the other hand, was too indolent to obtain more than average honour, either in the class-room or the playground. Sometimes he would be seized by an ambitious impulse, and make colossal preparations for an intellectual, or an athletic campaign, but these determinations soon died from sheer weariness, and he was content with some petty success, suffering himself to be beaten afterwards by rivals without half his ability.

His good-natured generosity made him generally

popular however, and as his father took care that his allowance should be a liberal one, it cost him little sacrifice to exercise it. Perhaps if motives were minutely examined, it might be found that many reputations seemingly substantial rest on equally slight foundations: Percy wished every one to be happy, after the arrangements for his own comfort were completed—he would even have “clasped the universe to his bosom to keep it warm,” if he had been perfectly certain that he would suffer no inconvenience by such comprehensive philanthropy.

After the first year or two, he did not spend the holidays at Seafern, but persuaded his father to come to London, and take him to whatever amusements were most attractive. Mr. Fenwood on these occasions felt as little at his ease, as a rustic at a literary conversazione, or a bishop in the green room of a theatre, and thought wistfully of his own quiet study, with its shelves of dingy books; but Percy wished it, so he went gravely to pantomimes, concerts, and public cricket matches, without complaint.

He would have been glad if Alice could have

been one of their party, for he had grown fonder of her than of any one in his narrow world except his boy; and she on her part, secretly longed to see these wonders of the great city; but she knew Percy had said girls were in the way, so she proudly persisted in declaring that she preferred to stay at home, though the self-denial cost her many unsuspected tears.

Sydney Mayfield left the school soon after his sixteenth birthday; but as he remained in London, the friendship of the two boys was not materially affected by this. Sydney was to be an architect, and had countless dreams of halls, palaces, and cathedrals, which were to rise at the bidding of his designing pencil; while Percy's highest ambition being merely to be rich and happy, he was quite content that his friend (in whose abilities he had unbounded faith) should gain distinction, feeling that the shadow of these immortal laurels, (almost as substantial a possession as the reality) would be his, without the trouble of working for them.

He spoke of his friend so constantly to his father, and always with such unqualified enthu-

siasm, that Mr. Fenwood became very anxious to see him; and gave him many cordial invitations to Seafern Hall, but various causes prevented Sydney's accepting these, though he met Mr. Fenwood more than once in London.

At length the time came for Percy to leave school, and numerous were the conversations which he held with his father as to the future course of his life, and the choice of a profession. In these discussions Percy wavered between all the suggestions which were offered, with serene impartiality, or decided with fitful partisanship, invariably revoking his choice before the week was over. Finally he adopted the course requiring least effort, and went to Oxford to pursue his studies, and to find out what his own predilections were.

Here he remained two years without taking any degree, and then obtained his father's permission to leave the university. Mr. Fenwood, to whom for many years books had been the dearest realities of life, had cherished the hope that his son would have gained brilliant honours; and was disappointed to find that the only fruits he could

show of his two years' residence at Oxford, were some not over-respectful letters from sundry tradesmen, imperatively demanding settlement of their "small accounts." But as no serious fault was alleged against Percy, and the debts were not large enough to give his father much anxiety, Mr. Fenwood wrote the necessary cheques, and consoled himself with the reflection that matters might have been worse.

With the cheques he sent a letter, weakly reproachful, and strongly affectionate, to the effect that he was sorry his allowance had been found insufficient, and disappointed that Percy had taken no degree: but that it was useless to waste words upon the past when the question of the future was still undecided; that it was years since Percy had visited Seafern, and that if he would come there for a month or two (bringing his friend Mayfield if possible, with him) they could talk together about the things requiring decision, far better than they could write.

This letter greatly relieved Percy's mind: he had not anticipated so lenient a reply, and although he had long devised excuses to prevent his visiting

the ruinous mansion which had once been his home, on this occasion he immediately determined to go there. After all it would be pleasant to see the old place again, its quiet, though likely soon to prove monotonous, would for a little while be rather an agreeable change to the noisy rapidity of college life, of which he was already beginning to grow tired.

"I wonder if Alice is as pretty now, as she used to be," he thought, "she never writes to me, but that's my fault. I should like to see her again—she must be seventeen now. Yes—I'll go; if Mayfield will come too, I don't see why we shouldn't have a lazy pleasant month of it, really enjoyable, in a sleepy kind of fashion."

So he wrote a dutiful and affectionate letter home, and Sydney Mayfield also accepting the invitation, the two young men one bright July morning, drove into the little village together.

"Nothing seems altered," said Percy breaking a brief silence, during which they had been attentively examining the country, "everything is the same: it looks as if they'd all been asleep ever since I went away; and really going to sleep seems

about the most sensible thing one can do, in such a dead and alive place—I'm half sorry I brought you down here."

"What an ungrateful fellow you are," returned his companion with a smile, "as if life had nothing worth having but Oxford wine parties, and midnight adventures. It's a good thing I never went there."

"I wish you had," said Percy, with something of his old genuine enthusiasm, "what glorious schemes we might have got up together; but I suppose you'd have been a reading man, and gone in for honours. You'd have won them too; but then you don't mind taking trouble and I do."

"I don't think life gives us any choice in the matter," replied Sydney quietly; "or if there is any choice, it is between taking trouble, and being the footstool for other men."

"I was never anybody's footstool."

"You have money, and that alters much, though I am far from certain that it materially affects my rule after all. 'The Ides of March are come' you say, but I reply with the soothsayer 'Yes Cæsar—but not past.'"

Percy did not altogether enjoy this reply, or the disagreeable prophecy which it suggested; but not seeing his way very clearly to a retort, he said—

“Well perhaps you’re right, but to return to what I was saying just now. You can’t pretend to admire this Heaven-forsaken village.”

“It is rather flat,” answered Sydney looking across the seemingly endless succession of cultivated fields, and neatly trimmed hedges, “I own I should be grateful for a few more hills; but it’s nonsense to say there’s nothing to admire.”

“I should very much like to know what it is,” was the discontented rejoinder.

“Well if you haven’t hills inland, you have cliffs by the sea, just look for a moment at those bold clear outlines, with the sunlight on the peaks, and the waves at the base; the church doesn’t improve the prospect certainly; but some of the cottages are really picturesque, and you forget that the sea redeems any landscape from monotony.”

“You are an ingenious advocate,” said Percy, “but I don’t think you’ve made out much of a

case; and even supposing all you said were true, what's the good of a place where"—

"Nonsense," interrupted the other laughing good-humouredly; "if Oxford has taught you nothing but to be cynical in this shallow fashion, you'd better have stayed away. Of course you can disparage everything, if you are determined to do so: you may say Hamlet is nothing but murder—Niagara nothing but water—and the Alps merely a collection of rocks and snow, but"—

"Well?" inquired Percy impatiently, for his companion did not finish the sentence. "What new attraction have you discovered in the scenery?"

Sydney continued to look steadily at some distant object, and at last said in no very lucid reply—

"She has a pretty figure at all events, but she's too far off for me to see very clearly what her face is like."

"Whom are you talking about?" demanded Percy, who being shortsighted, had observed no one in the distance.

"A tall girl who is walking in this direction."

"One of the fishermen's daughters I suppose," returned Percy indifferently.

"If you were not so shortsighted, it would be my painful duty to pitch you into the road, for the impertinence of the suggestion. Do the fishing-girls of Seafern wear light blue dresses, and bewilderingly pretty straw hats? If this isn't a young lady, I never saw one in my life before."

"On the faith of her dress and hat, I suppose" said Percy making desperate attempts to see the mysterious maiden.

"On the faith of a free and graceful bearing, bright brown hair, and a lovely face; she's a little more sunburnt than one pictures Desdemona, but it seems to suit her somehow. What a sweet face! you never told me Percy that Seafern could boast of beauties. You see her now, don't you?"

"Yes, at last; but not with your hawk-like eyes. Do you think she sees us?"

"Evidently not."

"Then suppose we send the carriage on, tell the coachman to wait for us at the Hall; I am tired

of sitting still, and if we drive past this unknown beauty, I shall scarcely get a glimpse of her."

Sydney readily consenting to this proposal, the coachman drove on with the luggage, the two young men following at a leisurely pace on foot.

Alice Easton (for the young lady whom Sydney had so accurately described, was no other than Percy's old playfellow, and ally against the tyranny of education), was taking her usual morning ramble with no anticipation of meeting any one, as Percy and his friend were not expected for two days. Naturally the approaching visit had been often in her thoughts, and at that very moment she was weaving a wide fabric of fancies and conjectures. Would the years have placed her childish companion beyond the reach of recognition? Sydney Mayfield too was coming, and this was stranger still; for ever since she read the letter describing the defeat of the miscreant Mudson, Alice had associated him with all that was heroic in manhood. The continuity of ideas had never been broken: in those days he had been Jack the Giant Killer—in these, he was King Arthur, or the Red Cross Knight.

And Alice was thinking wistfully about herself that bright summer morning. The fairy cave on the beach below, was little changed by the constant touch of wind and wave; but the light-hearted child who had discovered it with so much delight, was gone more utterly than if she had been sleeping beneath the quiet beauty of the churchyard grass. In the fair flush of its youth and beauty, the life of early womanhood has usually much of buoyant hope, and little of regretful memory; but Alice looking back on the last ten years could not wholly repress a weary misgiving, that she had been better and happier then than now. She knew more certainly, and she was conscious that her face had never been so fair; but she had grown lonely and self-contained; and the world's tints were more sombre now than in days of old.

Reflecting in this fashion—her mind, a tangle of memories and anticipations—of disappointment at her own attainments and nature, mingled with the irrepressible sense of joy in mere existence; which however contradictory to the encouraged thoughts, is rarely long absent from healthful life

at seventeen ; Alice walked on, with her eyes fixed on the ground, till the immediate proximity of footsteps abruptly disturbed her train of thought, and looking up, she saw Percy and his friend, only a few yards before her.

“ Alice ! ”

“ Percy ! ”

This mutual recognition was evidently a surprise ; pleasant to both, as the premature realization of an expected gladness always is. In the rapid glance which preceded it, each had seen something of the remembered past, and more of the altered present, though actual perception of change or fulfilment in mind or character, would of course require more deliberate observation.

“ I thought you had forgotten me Alice,” said Percy breaking the silence which followed this laconic greeting.

“ I was thinking of other things, and did not see you,” she replied, with a quick bright glance which vividly recalled the child Alice of long ago, “ but you know I never forget.”

“ Then you will remember our old hero Mayfield,” returned Percy introducing his friend.

"Where is your luggage?" inquired Alice after a few more words of greeting.

"We sent it on about ten minutes ago, didn't you see it on the road?"

"A carriage passed me, but it never occurred to me that it could be yours. We didn't expect you before Thursday."

"You must have taken to day-dreaming," laughed Percy, "the Alice of old days was a very practical little maiden."

"She is so still I think," was the quiet rejoinder, "Seafern is not conducive to imagination."

"Why not Miss Easton?" said Sydney who had been waiting for an opportunity to attract those large dark eyes in his direction.

"You will not need to ask the question after you have been here a week Mr. Mayfield."

"You will permit me to be sceptical on the point," said Sydney, "Percy has been accusing the place of dulness, but I have attacked the charge as heresy. I am looking forward to widely different impressions of Seafern, Miss Easton, I assure you."

"You are sanguine then."

"You see he never studied grammar with Miss Gordon for a teacher," said Percy, "how is that frigid enchantress?"

Sydney thought he could detect a momentary gleam of mischief in the young girl's eyes, but there was none in her voice when she answered—

"Miss Gordon has been very kind to me since you went away; she is almost my only companion."

"Not a very cheerful one I should think," retorted that lady's former disciple, "I should sooner think of making a companion of a polar bear. There might be warmth in its caresses, but there never was warmth in hers."

"I believe I have grown cold too," replied Alice speaking only half in jest.

"Were you about to pay a visit of charity in the village, Miss Easton?" asked Sydney, breaking another pause.

Alice slightly coloured as she replied—

"I am ashamed to say I rarely pay those visits, I know very little of the people here, nor they of me; as it was only a purposeless ramble, shall we go back together?"

The suggestion being agreed to, they walked towards the Hall; Percy at many places on the road recalling childish adventures, which he and Alice had shared in the years that now seemed so far away. While the old companions were talking together, Sydney had an excellent opportunity of observing Alice's face, and convinced himself that his first impressions had not been erroneous. It possessed not only the rare gift of beauty; but the rarer grace of character, her voice was singularly sweet, but though she spoke with perfect ease and self-possession, there was too evident a coldness in her manner. Was this natural or acquired—the result of training, or the original bias of her nature? Considerations of this kind passed rapidly through Sydney's mind as he walked beside her. A pretty girl is always an interesting study, especially on a bright July morning, when the only sounds other than glad voices are the rustling murmur of leafy trees, and the long-drawn sigh of breaking waves receding on the shingly beach.

At the Hall they were received with an enthusiasm wholly foreign to the daily life of that

stately mansion. Mr. Fenwood stopped in the middle of an algebraical calculation—an event quite without a precedent; while even Miss Gordon was momentarily betrayed into something that might almost have been mistaken for warmth. Actuated by widely dissimilar motives, every one was glad that Percy and his friend had at last come to Seafern; and in spite of his unsparing depreciation of the village, and all that related to it, he himself half regretted that he had stayed away so long.

No one thought of the visit in any graver light: but that summer morning stretched away to remote results. It is trite to speak of the importance of trifles; but human life is so finely balanced, that it is utterly futile to attempt to measure the distant effect of what seems to be the lightest touch.

Time's work is not merely to destroy, though we popularly represent him armed only with a scythe. The stern tyrant is a weaver of vast skill, blending incongruous threads into one web—a builder raising fantastic structures in unlikely places—a musician whose touch evolves subtle

harmonies and wild discords—and an alchemist into whose crucible all the emotions of humanity are cast.

In this mechanical age when the tendency of universal thought is to become material, it would not be strange to think of him as a smith, working ceaselessly with anvil, hammer, and glowing fire.

The history of his vast forge is the history of the world. Here the royal workman knowing neither rest nor pity, fashions by the toil of patient years the varied forms of human society, and of individual life—often destroying the result of protracted effort by a single blow.

Here too from strange metals, openly and in secret—by long-continued pressure, and by rapid strokes, are forged the fetters of memory, which bind in relentless captivity the souls of men.

CHAPTER VIII.

How am I worse than other men ? The world
Cants ceaselessly of honour ; yet the truth
Is sold in ev'ry mart ; and they who kneel
With downcast eyes, in dim cathedral shade,
May stoop to fraud to-morrow, or e'en now
Be planning secret treachery.

THE last audible vibration of the midnight chimes had died away, and the streets which only a few hours before, had been channels for the rapid stream of London life, were becoming noiseless and deserted. The day had been very hot, and the manifold activities of the hurrying crowds had seemed even more than usually feverish ; but now the quiet night had folded the city in her comprehensive mantle ; and the silent darkness of the houses showed that most of the citizens had retired to rest ; and were probably as the little philosopher of Weissnichtwo grimly observed—“lying in horizontal positions and dreaming the foolishhest dreams.”

Here and there a light burned, and on such a

sultry night, when all the ordinary objects of life were sacrificed to the desire to keep cool, this was generally suggestive of some unusual incident; but the few pedestrians who passed these dwellings, were too absorbed in their own reflections to give them more than a momentary glance of careless observation. In one of the houses thus distinguished from the general monotony, two men were seated together in a room, which although large and lofty, was hot and close from the glare of gaslight, and the heavy fumes of stale tobacco smoke. The elder man who was probably fifty years of age, had the dress and appearance of a respectable tradesman. His eyes were keen and shrewd, and his expression grave; but the most notable thing about him was the air of dogged determination in his features, especially his mouth, the lips of which were thin and compressed, as though he were resolved to prevent by physical force, the utterance of a rash promise or a needless word. The other man seemed at least twenty years younger than his companion; and both his dress and demeanour were suggestive of a higher grade in society. His face was handsome, with-

out being attractive, and when he spoke there was a harshness in his voice, which unpleasantly accorded with the boisterous self-assertion of his manner. The furniture of the room was anomalous: through the half-opened folding-doors at the farther end of the apartment a billiard-table could be discerned; and the cottage piano was heaped up with a litter of cheap books, play-bills, and two or three empty bottles; on the table lay a pack of cards, and a small pile of silver, at which the younger man was gazing with undisguised discontent; but the neat little workbox, the water-colour sketches on the wall of some Devonshire scenery; and the attempts to relieve the dingy shabbiness of the faded chairs, by some elegant trifles of girlish fancy-work, showed that other and widely different influences were present also.

“Upon my word, you are a hard taskmaster, Ford,” said the younger of the two men, pocketing the silver already alluded to, with a contemptuous gesture. “I give you the advantage of all my abilities—I work for you like a slave—I see you growing richer every day, while I a gentleman

have to be contented with a miserable pittance like this. I could earn more money as a cab-driver."

"I should advise you to be a cab-driver then" said the other slowly, "you are not particular."

His companion did not immediately reply, but began pacing up and down the room, with evident impatience. At length he said angrily—

"By Jove, it's well for me I'm not; things have come to a pretty pass, when a man like you, the son of a beggarly tradesman, can lord it over me in this fashion—do you know that I'm a gentleman, sir? that I've served in the army, and been spoken of in aristocratic circles as a gallant British officer; do you know"—

"I know that you are a fool" said the other composedly, "have you anything to say?"

"You are the first man that has ever called Henry Drummond a fool" was the rejoinder, "but since you put the direct question I *have* something to say."

"Then leave off swaggering, and say it."

With a laugh half of vexation at his ineffectual attempt to assert himself; and half of constrained admiration of his companion's imperturbability,

Drummond took the chair he had recently vacated, and resumed in an altered tone—

“That confounded coolness of yours, Ford, carries everything before it; but I put it to you—isn't it enough to make a man wild, to find himself paid in shillings instead of pounds?”

“You told me you had something to say.”

“So I have—it's this, I'm sick of these miserable winnings—I'm tired of being a penniless vagabond: I know that if I had money, friends would recognise me again, and discover that though a little wild, I was always a capital fellow after all. I could do fifty things if I had money, and I mean to have it.”

“Very laudable; but how”—

“That's exactly what I mean to tell you. I met a young fellow at Oxford, who is just the kind of man I want; in fact it's quite what my poor mother would have called a providential thing. He is generous, thoughtless, and light-hearted—the only son of a rich old country gentleman, who dotes on the darling boy; and would do anything for him.”

"Can you manage him?" inquired Ford with a quick glance of intelligence.

"He asks Henry Drummond if he can manage a boy," said that worthy, indignantly addressing imaginary crowds of listening gods and mortals. "Of course I can manage him, he is just the kind of fellow who can be influenced by any one, but a dull knave like you."

"A fool?" asked Ford ignoring the personal compliment.

"No, or the case wouldn't be half so hopeful, he is quick and bright, but thoroughly weak—fond of flattery as a girl, and with no small opinion of his own judgment; but enough of this, if you'll only make it worth my while, I'll introduce him to you and you shall see for yourself."

"What do you propose?"

"To bring him here for a quiet game of billiards, and to shape my future course according to circumstances."

"And what do you expect to gain by this?"

"It will be time enough to talk about the division of profits when there is a nearer prospect of

winning them, though I don't think that day is far distant, I"—

He was interrupted by the entrance of a girl whose face presented as striking a contrast to his own, as the suggestions of refinement in the room bore to its otherwise dissipated appearance. After a word or two of unpleasantly familiar greeting, delivered with a very poor assumption of ease, Drummond remarked that the hour was late, and carelessly humming the first few bars of a drinking song, left the father and daughter, for such they were, alone together. For a few minutes neither spoke, but on the girl's part the silence was not inactive, for moving quietly about the room, she contrived to introduce order in the place of chaos, wherever her light fingers touched. As she did this her father watched her intently, and the change which her presence had so speedily wrought in the room, was not more remarkable than the transformation in his face. His eyes in following her gained a gentler light, the rigid lines of his features softened, and when at length he spoke, it was with quite an altered voice, to the laconic harshness of his former conversation.

"You are a good girl Mary, sometimes I think if you were always with me I should be a different man ; why are you up so late?"

His daughter seated herself at his feet, and turning her clear honest eyes which seemed incapable of evasion, on his face, replied hurriedly—

"I cannot sleep when that man is alone with you, father you would make me so happy if you would promise never to see him again."

"Why do you talk like this, Mary? I never heard you speak against any one else in my life. Why do you dislike him?"

"Because his face is crafty and cruel, and I'm sure his heart is so. Oh! father, if you love me, and your every word and look show that you do, listen to what I have to say."

Her father seemed as surprised at her unusual agitation, as if a child had suddenly stood before him with stern words of reproach; for her everyday life was quiet and unobtrusive, and he had never imagined that she possessed sufficient force of character, or originality of thought, to place herself in direct opposition to the current of pro-

bable events. He stroked her hair gently, however, and said—

“You must have been dreaming, Mary, to talk like this.”

“Dreaming!” she echoed. “Then my whole life is a dream, for these dark thoughts are never absent from my mind. Dear father, you have always been noble and kind to me—I should know that your heart was true if all the world denied it—only men like this could ever turn you from your better nature.”

“I do not understand you, Mary. What is it that you have to ask?”

“That you will leave this manner of life, that you will come away with me to some quiet country-place, where we can earn our living by more honest means. Our wants are few, and I have grown quite clever with my needle. I have thought long of this, and if you will consent, and never touch a card again, we may get away from this hot, crowded city, and no one be so happy in all England as you and I.”

“Why do you hate the cards, Mary?” he said, catching at the last phrase of her appeal.

"Because they are cruel," she answered, hurriedly, "their very colours tell it; for they are red as blood and black as shame. Father, you think I have observed nothing, but I have seen such sights that I wonder to-night I am not grey and old."

"What sights, Mary?"

"I have seen things in your face—the face which is all gentleness and truth to me, that I have not dared to read; I have seen men leave this house with looks of haggard misery, which haunt me day and night, which told, as if the words had been written in letters of brass, that all the hopes of their lives were crushed. You know all this, father, as well as I, and yet do you ask me what I have seen?"

The hand which rested on the young girl's hair trembled, and when at length her father answered her, it was with a fluent energy very unlike the harsh brevity of his wonted manner.

"Mary, you talk like an inexperienced girl—say that my life is all you describe it, and your hand at least might have painted it in kinder colours; even then, how am I worse than other men? If I have gambled, I have always played fairly; I vow

to you that I have never stooped to cheat or lie. You talk about haggard faces—well I admit I trade upon the weaknesses of other men; but so does every one else, only they cant more than I. What defence can you find for the bishop who lives in a palace, while his curates and their ill-clad children almost starve—for the lawyer who connives at crime, and pleads for perjury, for the sake of his fee—for the merchant who builds up a great fortune on a thousand petty tricks and small deceptions? The laws of the hawk and the pike may seem hard and unnatural to eyes like yours, but I tell you, Mary, it is part of the universal system, which gives one creature to be the prey of another.”

The girl buried her face in her hands, silenced for a moment by this unlooked-for passion; at length however, she said firmly—

“Your truer self does not talk like this, father; in all callings bad men will be wicked, but in yours only is a good man compelled to be base.”

He felt the force of her rebuke, which swept away the mists of his cynical sophistry, as truth must always do; and he kissed her very tenderly before replying—

‘You are a good girl, Mary, as I said before. Do not think I love this life, or would willingly continue it. Go to bed now, darling—I will not forget your words, and perhaps—who knows?—your pretty dream of a country cottage may soon be a reality.’

Seeing that further words would be useless, his daughter bade him an affectionate good-night, and left him.

When he was once more alone, something of the old hardness seemed to steal over the gambler’s face. It was not quite the same as it had been before her entrance, for it suggested a struggle between warring emotions of good and evil; but whereas while she had been with him his better impulses had been dominant, now that she was gone the more deeply rooted habits of his life asserted themselves.

‘It’s all very well talking of cottages,’ he muttered to himself, ‘but one can’t live on nothing. The girl is right up to a point—it’s a wretched style of life, that’s true enough, but I can’t leave it yet. Let Drummond bring this young fool he talks about; and if I can win any-

thing from him that's really worth having, Mary shall have her way. After all there's no harm in this; I shall play fairly, and all experience must be paid for. What are heavy losses to a man who has more money than he knows what to do with, compared to the peace of mind and happiness of an innocent girl like mine?"

And such is the strange moral tangle in a nature habitually trained to self-deception, that he felt this to be almost a satisfactory solution of the problem; and went to rest with a conscience comparatively clear.

CHAPTER IX.

Now, from the days when it was always summer in Eden, to these days when it is mostly winter in fallen latitudes, the world of a man has invariably gone one way—the way of the love of a woman.

CHARLES DICKENS.

THE visit of Percy Fenwood and his friend to Seafern, unlike most eagerly expected things, was not a disappointment. To Alice it seemed as if the whole world had gained a new aspect, just as in her childish days, she had watched with delighted surprise how the long-looked-for sunshine formed a miniature rainbow of every dewdrop, cast a thousand glittering charms on wave and upland, and made the yellow sands an endless vista of glowing gold. Nor was this strange, although the new pleasures were of a very simple nature; for apart from the fact that a girl of seventeen has rarely quite outgrown the rapid sensibilities of childhood, life in Seafern had been such a monotonous routine of seclusion, that

she was prepared to find enchantment in any companionship, more congenial than that of Mr. Fenwood and Miss Gordon; as prisoners liberated after weary years of unshared captivity, regard the smallest thing that has life, as that rarest of all possessions—a friend.

The years which had passed away since they saw the little girl with the headless doll, in the great drawing-room at Seafern Hall, had wrought as has been already indicated, few perceptible changes in that establishment; but the house-keeper who had greeted the child so gently, had been old then, and now was daily becoming less equal to the light duties of her office. Her loyalty being firm as ever, and her belief in her own physical powers unbounded, she could not be prevailed upon to accept a pension, and leave the work to younger hands. Mr. Fenwood who liked to keep familiar faces round him, both from the natural kindness of his disposition, and from his constitutional abhorrence of change, was secretly glad of this; and preferred to endure the—to him—trivial inconvenience of occasional mismanagement, to the graver trial of having some one near

him whose face and voice he did not know, who might suddenly develop unlooked-for and alarming characteristics ; and who was almost certain to disarrange his cherished books and papers, under the delusion she was doing him a service.

But at length a compromise was effected—Miss Gordon having steered Alice with considerable ability and perseverance, through the long course of study she had originally sketched out ; and her pupil being almost a woman, their relations as teacher and disciple naturally ceased. There being no society for Alice however in Seafern, Mr. Fenwood proposed that Miss Gordon should remain as her companion—should superintend the more responsible duties of the house, leaving the old housekeeper such small congenial labours, as the domain over sundry capacious cupboards—the arrangement of Mr. Fenwood's private rooms, and the possession of a large bunch of keys comprised. This arrangement had been definitely made a few months before the arrival of the friends at the Hall, and was generally considered successful.

“ Well Sydney,” said Percy the first night, having lounged into his friend's bedroom, to see.

if he had everything he wanted before going to rest himself, "what do you think of my home?"

"You know I defended it this morning when you were attacking it."

"I don't mean the place, I mean the house, and my father and Alice."

"Your father is very kind," said Sydney evasively, "and the house so far as I have seen it, seems quite my idea of an old country mansion; but you shall have my views on that subject when I have had leisure to examine it carefully. As for Miss Easton, except that she is very pretty, I have formed no decided opinion."

"I'm not surprised," returned Percy yawning, "when I left her, she was as bright a little girl as I ever saw in my life—now she seems petrified; but who can wonder at it; this place is like a prison, and Miss Gordon was born to be a gaoler."

Sydney laughed.

"You ought to have more respect for a former teacher," he said, "but I must candidly own, there's something disconcerting about her. Has your fertile brain no suggestion how to thwart her

influences? otherwise we may find her decidedly in the way."

"I can think of nothing," replied Percy, "unless we can bribe some old fisherman to carry her away, and keep her in close confinement for the next few weeks—what do you say to that?"

"Too melodramatic—Oxford ought to have made a better diplomatist of you; but perhaps the dawn will bring a more hopeful expedient. Are you going to bed so soon? Well you're half asleep already, which perhaps accounts for the slightly dreamy character of your last suggestion—good-night."

"What a delightful day for boating," said Sydney, next morning at breakfast, "are you fond of the water Miss Easton?"

"She almost lives upon it," replied Mr. Fenwood, "I think sometimes she is a mermaid."

"She will suit Sydney then," remarked Percy, "I have often told him he is a monomaniac on the subject."

"You used to be fond of the sea yourself Percy," said Alice.

"Used I? My devotion has cooled down a little

then. Rowing is too much trouble for me, unless it is on the river, with the tide in one's favour; but you and Sydney must go out together this morning and test your skill—I shall stay at home with my father."

These very simple words produced a marked effect. Sydney warmly seconded the suggestion, which Alice approved with a smile of glad assent; while Mr. Fenwood delighted at this unwontedly dutiful conduct on his son's part, was roused to something remotely resembling animation.

But Miss Gordon's face gave indication of a darkness that could be felt—arising doubtless from the sense of outraged propriety; so that during the rest of the time they were all together, like Juliet—she spoke, yet she said nothing.

"Alice!" she exclaimed when the others had left the room, "I thought better things of you."

"What is the matter Miss Gordon?" inquired the culprit, in a tone less submissive than usual.

"What is the matter? Is it possible you don't see the glaring impropriety of going out to sea alone in a boat with a young man, and he almost a stranger to you."

"No," said Alice resolutely, "I don't. Mr. Mayfield is Percy's friend and Mr. Fenwood's guest; I didn't propose the excursion, but I certainly won't give up my usual pleasure, for a ridiculous motive of mere prudishness; if you don't approve of my going alone, come with us."

The astonishment with which Miss Gordon contemplated this unlooked-for avowal of insubordination, changed into a determination quite Napoleonic in its intensity, as she uttered the words inseparably associated with the seal of a woman's destiny—

"I will."

Alice looked surprised at this dauntless acceptance of her challenge; but made no further comment, and Sydney shortly afterwards joining them, the three started for the beach without further delay.

There was something sombre, not to say funereal in the procession; for Miss Gordon preserved a grim taciturnity, which had a visible effect upon Alice, while Sydney after several attempts at courteous commonplace, abandoned the idea of conversation in despair.

Datchby (whose life had been rendered by age and rheumatism little more than the opportunity for the consumption of unlimited tobacco, and the narration of tales which made him, in the judgment of all who knew him, quite a naval Othello) had got the boat ready for them ; and was gazing at it with affectionate and admiring eyes. By special permission he had christened her " Alice," and though her somewhat clumsy shape had made the compliment a doubtful one, it had at least the effect of making the rough strongly built little boat fairer in his opinion, than the most wondrous vessel that ever breasted a storm, or spread her white sails to a summer breeze.

" Are you sure your boat is safe Mr. Datchby ? " inquired Miss Gordon, this being the first observation that had fallen from her lips, with the exception of two or three desolate monosyllables, since they left the house.

Datchby took his pipe from his mouth, and gazed at Miss Gordon with a look of wounded pride.

" Safest boat afloat," he answered gruffly, adding after a brief pause, " D'ye think I'd risk Miss Alice's life for all the gold o' Californy ? "

The emphatic tone of this retort made it unanswerable; though Miss Gordon by no means appreciated the implication that her own personal safety was not a reasonable ground for any one's anxiety. Sydney mentally marked the old sailor as a worthy object for future small gratuities: he experienced at the same moment a comical consciousness, that the depressed expression of himself and his two companions would suggest to an observer that their purpose was a gloomy one—that Alice was to be given as a prey to the hunger of the sea—that he was to be the unwilling executioner; and that Miss Gordon was the unyielding judge who had pronounced the stern decree, and was attending the tragic ceremony personally, to see that the doom was conscientiously enforced.

The boat was launched, and before they had been many minutes on the water there was a perceptible change in their faces. Alice felt returning animation and brightness at the caress of the fresh salt breeze, and the old familiar music of breaking waves; and Sydney solaced himself with the reflection that although the atmosphere

of the Friends' meeting-house was not exciting even a silent companion was far from disagreeable when she was as fair as the young girl sitting near him, with heightened colour and brightening eyes.

But the transformation in Miss Gordon's face was widely different; although the sea was far from rough, it soon became evident that she felt its playfulness too boisterous, and was on the verge of that physical and mental condition when the universe is regarded as a failure; and the endless æons of eternity are powerless to yield one ray of hope.

"Are you not well Miss Gordon?" said Alice with unfeigned sympathy, when she noticed the unnatural pallor of her *chaperon's* cheeks.

"I am very well indeed," replied that lady with more dignity than strict veracity. Evidently she wished to fancy so, for she tried to smile, but the effect was decidedly ghastly, like the smile of a courtier at a royal jest announcing the confiscation of half his estates for the benefit of a rival.

They rowed on for a few minutes in silence, the misery of Miss Gordon obviously becoming more poignant with every stroke of the oars. Neither of her companions had felt very amiably towards

her at starting, but the revenge which is not more than satisfied, by seeing its adversary in such unutterable anguish as hers, must be little short of diabolical; in the present instance, they felt every trace of resentment effectually dispelled; and after a good deal more persuasion from Alice that they should return, which was rejected with the fortitude of a martyr, Sydney said in a decided tone, pointing to a very small cloud in the far west—

“That may mean rain. I shall assert my authority as captain; and take you ladies home without consulting you. If you get drenched, all Seafern will put the blame on my London ignorance of wind and weather.”

This could be accepted without a compromise of dignity, and the dejected voyagers returned immediately; Miss Gordon on arriving at the Hall went straight to her bedroom, and was seen no more that day; what was the nature of her solitary reflections, history has never been able to ascertain: but it seems probable she may have mused on the ingratitude of the goddess of social propriety, for whose sake her perilous enterprise had been undertaken.

The next day was persistently rainy, and when

Miss Gordon at length appeared, it was with unwonted nervousness, evidently arising from anxiety lest her rebellious disciple should beguile the tedium of compulsory imprisonment by allusions to her melancholy adventure of the day before. Alice, however, was magnanimous, and suffered the hours to pass without any reference to it whatever. The only occasion when she swerved from this praiseworthy forbearance was on the following morning, when, it being once more brilliantly fine, another boating excursion was suggested.

"Will you come with us Miss Gordon?" she inquired naïvely.

And Miss Gordon's emphatic negative was accompanied by a reproachful look, almost Gorgon-like in its petrifying power.

So the cause of freedom triumphed, and the amateur duenna ventured upon the treacherous ocean no more. Percy though far less an enthusiast than his companions, would sometimes join them: on other days they would wander together on the banks of the little river called the Fern, where in a sufficiently shady spot, Percy could indulge in his favourite occupation of fishing. In

this as in most things his habits were thoroughly characteristic ; for he handled his rod dexterously ; and threw his lines deftly, but altogether abstained from any violent exertion, such as wading in the stream. He bore all teasing however, concerning his indolence, with admirable good-humour ; and although his frequent conversations with his father were almost absolutely fruitless, Mr. Fenwood showed by every look and gesture that his old idolatrous affection for his boy had in no way decreased through the long months of absence. Miss Gordon's former partiality for her old pupil also revived, so that even when they were not on the sea, Sydney and Alice were very often alone together.

And so the days passed in swift succession, their various methods of beguiling the time were commonplace enough, as life in Seafern must always have been—drives and walks, conversations recalled long afterwards ; and the ever-enjoyable boating ; these are simple things, yet when we analyse the sweetest moments we have known, we generally find their charm lay in sources equally trivial.

And one thing is certain—Alice was very happy.

CHAPTER X.

I ask from thee nor word, nor smile, nor sigh,
Nor gentle pressure of the yielding hand ;
Far less a pledge of kindred loyalty—
A glove, a rosebud, or a tress of hair ;
But from this hour thou art my life—thine eyes
The light by which alone I strive and hope—
Thy lightest word an anthem, and thy heart
The universe to me.

“My pleasant holiday ends to-morrow, Miss Easton.”

Sydney made the remark in no very cheerful tone, as they rowed together in Datchby's little boat for the last time. To Alice the words were quite unexpected, and seemed to take all the brightness out of the summer morning. She gave no further indication of feeling, however, than was involved in a tighter clasp of the oar she held, and the increased rapidity and strength with which she made it cleave the water. Silently acquiescing in this arrangement, Sydney quickened his own stroke, and they advanced a few minutes at almost racing speed ; then he said laughingly—

“We have no pursuers, Miss Easton, and there

are no shipwrecked mariners near for us to rescue. Suppose we take to our usual pace."

Alice complied with a slight blush, and as she did so, he could not refrain from complimenting her on the grace and strength of her rowing.

"It is not strange," she answered quickly, "my father used to row not for pleasure, but for bread."

There were a great many conflicting feelings in Alice's breast at that moment—wakened into life by the thought of coming separation, and not at all composed by her recent rapid exertions. She could not trust herself with any degree of certainty, and pride seemed to be the safest refuge. Moreover she had long wondered if he knew the story of her birth, and if not, what effect its curt avowal would have upon him; but he only said quietly—

"I have heard of him from your weather-beaten subject Datchby, and your sailor-like clergyman Mr. Ellis. They speak of him as the old minstrels sang of Hereward. It is little wonder—there are all the elements of tragedy in the tale, simple as it is—a fair woman and a brave man—love, sorrow, and death."

Alice's eyes thanked him, and he said—

"Would you care to hear my story? It is not very stirring or romantic, but confidence should not be one-sided."

"I should like to hear it very much, Mr. Mayfield."

"Then will you kindly take the rudder, and give me your oar? Thank you. We can adopt Percy's favourite method, and drift with the tide, or at least offer little resistance to it."

Having handed her to her seat, he continued without further preface—

"My father was the youngest son of a rather large family. They were rich and proud, though why, my utmost ingenuity could never discover. My grandfather had left each of his children a tolerable fortune, though hampered with many restrictions; of which the only one I need trouble you with, was, that the money should accumulate at interest till the respective legatees were one-and-twenty; and in the event of any of them dying before that age, was to revert to the other members of the family. Have I made this intelligible? To begin a narrative with dry business details is in-artistic, but it's necessary sometimes."

“Yes, I follow you perfectly.”

“Well when my father was nineteen, all his brothers and sisters had attained their majority, and received their shares in the will. He regulated his life by similar expectations, and had no profession, though his devotion to art made that his constant occupation. One day while he was buying brushes, or colours, or something of that kind, there came into the shop one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen. This story has reached me at second and third hand; but I know she was beautiful, for I have seen her portrait, painted by himself, and many who knew her well have told me it was a wonderfully faithful likeness.”

He paused here, as if he were watching the face of which he spoke. His companion waited silently until he resumed—

“She was very young—not more than seventeen. Her father had been an officer in the army, but was now an invalid living in strict privacy on a small pension, with no companion or friend in the world except his daughter; the tale told properly would be a long one, but briefly it is this—my father obtained an introduction to her—saw her

often, and when the old man to whom she was devoted died—they were married.”

Alice was so interested, that she had forgotten her duty of steering, and had suffered the boat to drift out of its course, in a very purposeless and undecided manner. Hastily rectifying this error, which they both observed at the same moment, she signed to him to proceed.

“My father’s brothers not unnaturally considered the marriage imprudent, and took no pains to conceal their opinion: of course he resented bitterly every slight upon his wife, and maintained very little intercourse with his family. Whether they would ever have become friends again matters little now; he died suddenly, a few months after his wedding, and my mother was left a young widow. If her husband had lived six weeks longer she would have been rich; as it was, she was totally unprovided for. You may guess the sequel—care, sorrow, and poverty, acting upon a constitution naturally delicate, soon wrought their work. She died while I was still a baby, and I was left in the world quite alone.”

"I thought you said your father's relations were living."

"True, but I was alone, absolutely, so far as any real sympathy went; my uncles held a consultation together, to discuss what was to be done with me, and while they were unanimous in considering my presence in the world at all, decidedly irrelevant and superfluous, were compelled to admit I was an obstinate fact, which in some way or other must be disposed of. So they decided I should be taken care of and kept at a sufficient distance; they making me a reasonable allowance—not by any means a generous one, but enough for my necessities, and for the rest, they doubtless reposed a pious trust in Providence, that I should be at length removed to a better world, from which demands for pecuniary assistance never come."

There was no bitterness in the smile with which he said this—merely a calm consciousness of the fact; and of his own strength of will, which disdained to be crushed by it.

"In course of time I was sent to school, and my life, except that it was lonelier, and perhaps more

self-reliant, became little different from that of other boys. The rest I think you already know."

"Had you no friend at all?" said Alice with girlish sympathy.

Sydney laughed—

"I had omitted the lighter element altogether," he said. "Yes, I had and have one friend—a good though rather a fantastic one; three of my uncles are living—I was going to say I could count the kind words they have spoken to me, but on reflection that would be difficult; for no such expression ever passed their lips, and I know very well when they die, they will not leave me the traditional shilling, or even their blessing, to soften the bitterness of bereavement. But my aunt, Miss Dorothy Mayfield, has been generous, and even amiable."

"Do you often go to see her?" inquired Alice; for she had never heard of this relative before, and her quick fancy rapidly sketched a manor house, with an adjoining park, where there was always a royal welcome for the owner's nephew.

"Not very often—her nervousness is disconcerting, her long stories are fatiguing, and it is

painful to be reminded every time I see her, that the only mention of my name in her will is in connection with a ring containing her hair, which, by the way, was a really unselfish bequest, for she has very little to spare. Of course, if I were wiser, as the world counts wisdom, I should oftener play the courtier; but I suppose I inherited imprudence from my father. At any rate, whenever I go to see her, I make matters worse, not better; I jar some peculiarly sensitive nerve—I break some worthless object of antiquated furniture or china which she considers priceless; or I horrify her by the utterance of heterodox views. Still, as I said before, she has been kind to me: my present position is not a brilliant one, but such as it is, I owe it to her; and when that mourning ring comes into my possession, which I hope may not be for many years (though I believe she never sees a possible heir to her wealth without suspicions of a concealed stiletto), I shall wear it with no touch of scorn."

They had now almost reached the beach, and further confidence was interrupted by a shout of recognition from Percy, who was watching with

indolent satisfaction the delight of two very small children, to whom he had given some bilious-looking sweets of local manufacture.

"What were you and Alice talking of so earnestly?" he inquired, when they had landed, and Datchby had arrived to take charge of the boat.

"We were speaking about my aunt Dorothy," was the not very communicative reply, "and she is a serious subject."

"On the contrary, you ought to consider it a delightful one; my own opinion is that she will leave you all her money some day."

"I wish I shared the impression. My own conviction is that the universality of political disinterestedness, critical fairness, friendly rivalry, and religious tolerance is an equally probable contingency. To descend to something more practical, what are your arrangements for this evening? It is my last, remember."

"Yes I know it is; what this place will be without you I shudder to imagine."

"You ignore both Miss Easton and my question. What do you propose doing to-night?"

"I beg your pardon, and Alice's too; I almost

forget if any plans have been made for this evening—probably we are threatened with some excursion which promises nothing but fatigue.”

“Mr. Mayfield has not seen ‘Sunrise Peak’ yet,” said Alice, laughing at Percy’s disinclination for anything that involved trouble.

“Well, I’ve no objection to going there, if he has none; though I have a misty impression that you must climb an appalling number of hills. It seems rather an Irish proceeding to go to a place with such a name when the sun is setting.”

“You are ingenious in finding objections,” said Sydney; “if logical consistence is so dear to you, which I never suspected, you can go alone to-morrow morning, a few hours before breakfast. You don’t see the force of that? Then we can consider the proposal settled: how did the place get its graceful name, Miss Easton? Is there any legend connected with it?”

Alice shook her head. “Seafern is not an imaginative place,” she said, “and I think the name has no deeper cause than the fact that the peak is really a high one, commanding an open view either of sunrise or sunset.”

The party for Sunrise Peak in the evening included Miss Gordon, who, although in unusually good humour, had firmly resolved that any farewell which might be uttered should take place in her presence. Sydney not unnaturally had a diametrically opposite determination; and was mentally arranging how that excellent lady might be herself utilised in a manoeuvre to get Percy out of the way also. Alice's co-operation was needful to this scheme, and his friend, quite unconscious of any stratagem to be employed against him, was monopolising her, and evidently making himself amusing; for her sweet girlish laughter reached Sydney's ears several times as he mechanically sustained a conversation with Miss Gordon.

When they reached the first hill however, Percy turned round and exclaimed, with a comical expression of dismal apprehension—"This is the beginning of sorrows. We may just as well rest here a little while; we shall be too early for the sunset if we go on now."

"That's true," said Alice; "we can spare a few minutes, and I must admit it is pleasanter waiting here than there, unless the day is very hot; but I don't think your laziness ought to be humoured."

This was the opportunity Sydney had been waiting for: after hazarding an affirmative reply to one of Miss Gordon's questions without the faintest idea what it was about, he said—

“What was Percy's subject, Miss Easton? It seemed to be an interesting one.”

“It was to me,” she answered, laughing at the recollection, “we were talking about the first day we met, of my introduction to his play-room, and the ingenuity with which he contrived to upset his rocking-horse when I was on it.”

“It was unchivalrous, I own,” interrupted the hero of that exploit, “but it was the beginning of our friendship. I remember it as well as if it happened yesterday. I know the fall hurt you, but mite as you were, I think you would have died sooner than confess it.”

“Because you had called me a baby, and I felt honour was at stake.”

“Yes, you had the advantage every way, except the slight inconvenience of a knock on the head. Do you remember the song you sang then about the horseman riding through the forest?”

“Yes, I have not forgotten it: it is almost the only relic I have of my life before that day.”

"I wish you would sing it now, Miss Easton."

The request came from Sydney, who had been listening attentively to the preceding dialogue.

"I never sing, Mr. Mayfield, and this song I ought hardly to have said I remembered, it was an old favourite of my father's; and I have treasured scraps of it in my memory all these years, fitting them together as best I could.

But here Miss Gordon interposed, and said Alice could sing it perfectly well if she chose. There was something so uncompromising in this style of contradiction, that she was constrained to yield; and gave the ballad in a voice that was sweet and true, though neither strong nor very highly cultivated.

These were the words—simple enough, yet often recalled in after years :—

" ' Only the stars our love to see,
Only the woods our words to hear ;
But the castle banner is floating free,
And the bugle summons rings loud and clear.
Ere moonlight fades into day, my love,
I must ride beyond the western hills,
To take my part in the fray, my love;
And die or triumph as duty wills.
'Tis sweet to meet in the moonlit woods,
Bright together though dark apart ;
But the steed must journey with rapid feet,
That travels for honour and fame, dear heart.' "

"The snow was cruel and fair to see,
On chilly upland and frozen stream ;
As she stood alone by the trysting tree,
And strained her eyes for his white crest's gleam.
But the altered forest was stern and cold—
An icy prison for soul and mind ;
As she said—' 'Tis well for the strong and bold,
But hard to tremble and wait behind.
Better to perish in knightly pride
With armour pierced by the archer's dart,
Than learn how desolate life can grow,
When love is alone in the world, dear heart.'

"But the forest sprang into leafy grace,
When sunbeams whispered the name of May ;
And a flush came back to the maiden's face,
As she stood by the trysting tree one day,
For a knight rode fast on that glad spring morn,
With trophies wrested from might and wrong ;
The hurried tramp of his steed was borne
On the air like the echo of martial song.
' 'Tis sweet to meet in the leafy woods,
When each has suffered so long apart,
And my horse has travelled with swift-winged feet,
To the shrine of thy beauty and love, dear heart.' "

"Thank you, Miss Easton. To reward Percy for upsetting you from your horse by such a song as that was generous, but scarcely politic."

"Why not?"

"Clearly because so interested a young gentleman would be tempted to repeat his transgressions. You must have a very good memory."

"For some things I think I have, but not for all; Miss Gordon will tell you the ineffectual struggles I have made to fix historical dates in my mind."

"How do you account for this song lingering with you through all these years? It is not one that would ordinarily take a child's fancy."

"I daresay I have not given the verses correctly; as for what I do remember I think that is mainly because of the air. You can hardly judge of it without the accompaniment: when my mother played and my father sang it, I used almost to hear the tramp of a horse and the crackling of dead branches beneath his feet. I have not so many memories of home that I should hold any carelessly; and I like the hurried activity of the song—I was always restless, even as a child."

"And if you retain anything of the characteristic Alice," interrupted Miss Gordon "we had better go on at once, or we shall not reach the peak till long after sunset."

"That is true" said Sydney, looking westward, "you are our guide Miss Easton, and we trust to you to take us the nearest way."

As he spoke their eyes met; it was only for a moment, and the glance was so natural that even Miss Gordon's lynx-like eyes failed to detect anything unusual in it; but Alice had read the meaning of his request, and he had seen in her face the mischievous assurance of consent.

Accordingly their path became steep and uneven, not only to the unpractised feet of the governess, but to Percy also; long habit had made Alice expert as a Swiss girl on her native mountains; and Sydney's athletic training made him little inferior to her. The inevitable consequence was, that while they made the ascent with undisguised enjoyment, their companions fell farther and farther behind, until at length a sudden turn in the winding path put them out of sight altogether. Breaking the silence in a low voice Sydney inquired—

“Where does this path lead to?”

“I am afraid if it's followed without any turning, it will lead down again to the beach” replied Alice demurely. “Hadn't we better wait till they join us?”

“If that was your object, you might have

spared Miss Gordon some discomfort; the last glimpse I had of them showed me Percy gazing ruefully at the departed brightness of his boots; and Miss Gordon's bonnet being ruthlessly caught by some high bushes; can we finish our journey to better purpose?"

"Yes if we retrace our steps a little we can reach the peak in a few minutes." Alice hesitated as though a further suggestion occurred to her, of which she was rather ashamed. Sydney understood it however, and replied in a quiet matter of fact way—

"That is excellent; then we will wait here comfortably screened by these obliging trees, until they have passed."

Alice's conscience severely reproached her, when in a few minutes Miss Gordon appeared in rather dishevelled attire, accompanied by Percy in no very amiable mood, for tangled paths, and muddy boots, were his supreme aversion.

"I can't think what has become of them," observed the lady, the serenity of her voice being ruffled in sympathetic harmony with her dress.

"Alice and your friend are so venturesome, they

seem to forget other people can't climb as they can."

"They are delighted to perceive it" whispered Sydney enjoying the security of their natural retreat. Alice put her finger on her lips to enjoin silence, but was in reality by far the more dangerous of the two, from her tendency to break forth into peals of laughter, to which impulse (when the disconsolate pair, little dreaming the proximity of the culprits, were fairly out of sight) she gave unrestrained indulgence; till the hills in their vicinity echoed the girlish music in a prodigal lavishness of joy.

When she was quieter, they resumed their progress; and in a little while reached the aimed-at summit, just in time to see Percy and his fair companion emerge crestfallen on the beach below—the former with some relief, the latter with evident indignation.

"They're waiting for us I believe," said Alice whose quick eyes detected every movement or change of position.

"Then they are likely to receive a gratuitous lesson in patience," returned Sydney coolly "which

in the case of *my* friend at all events is greatly needed. They will soon be tired of waiting, and they have an easy road home—never mind them, look at the sunset.”

Alice did so, and for a few minutes neither of them spoke. The changing glories of purple, crimson, and gold which elude all description, and awaken in the dullest hearts a dim consciousness of personal littleness, and divinely created beauty, seemed very wonderful to her just then; but her quick sensibilities were too deeply touched for words, and it was Sydney who at length broke the silence—

“It is idle to rail at city life, but I think we should grovel a little less, if the smoke of our factories, and our crowds of unsightly buildings, did not hide such poems as that from our eyes.”

“Do you not like London Mr. Mayfield?”

“I will not say that—it is the fittest arena for noble activity, the best school I know for the development of character—a mighty theatre for the great drama of life, besides it is my natural sphere, and I must return to it to-morrow. There

is something I wish to say to you before I go, may I say it now ? ”

She inclined her head, and he continued—

“ If I idealised this quiet little village just now, it was not singular—it has been very bright to me, and you know the secret of the enchantment. For me to say that I love you after a month, may seem strange, but we have seen more of each other than in years of ordinary social intercourse ; I have ceased to fancy myself at all remarkable, but I know my own nature, and it has no common strength of purpose or feeling. My destiny is sealed, and its weal or sorrow lies in your hands.”

He paused a moment, and Alice might have spoken, much as the effort would have cost her, but he resumed quickly—

“ Last night I thought of this in every light, and made my resolve. There were three courses open to me, one was to leave Seafern without a word of this, but that I could not do—the second was to try and win some promise from you—this was tempting, but I dared not in honour take it. I am too poor to bind you with any fetters if you would deign to wear them, for you have been used

to luxury from your childhood; besides you are very young—you have seen nothing of the world, and it would be dishonourable and selfish if I forced from you a promise which your maturer womanhood might regret. The third is to speak as I have done—to tell my secret, and yet leave you free; some day I will return and ask you for a responsive word; but I shall not think you heartless or cruel if you refuse it; though such a refusal would crush the dearest hope I have on earth.”

“May I say nothing?” said Alice without raising her eyes from the ground.

“You may tell me if you will that you are not angry.”

And she answered—

“You are kind and good—better women than I would feel honoured by such words as these.”

It was probably the first time in her life she had spoken of herself as a woman; but the last few minutes had stirred many new thoughts and hopes in her heart. They said little to each other on the way home, but that moonlight walk was never forgotten by either. On arriving at the Hall,

Sydney took all the responsibility of having missed his companions, and replied to the accusations with so many ingenious attacks on Percy's indolence, that that wronged individual soon found it expedient to drop the subject. Miss Gordon said little, beyond a somewhat satirical inquiry, if he had appreciated the sunset, to which he replied it was one of the finest he had ever seen in his life.

And to Alice's heart it seemed so too.

CHAPTER XI.

He wanted a wife his braw house to keep,
But favour wi' wooin' was fashious to seek.

BARONESS NAIRN.

PERCY did not remain in Seafern long after his friend's departure. The discussions with his father on the knotty point of a profession, had been almost as fruitless as the debates of graver assemblies; for the spirit of faction, and the spirit of vacillation, are alike incompatible with any intelligent action. But two or three days after Sydney had gone, Mr. Fenwood was delighted to hear his son say that he was convinced the right career for him was the law. This was precisely what the father wished, for it not only opened avenues leading to limitless honours, but suggested the hope that it might end by making Percy as fond of dingy folios, as he was himself. It was an unlooked for pleasure too, as Percy had lately manifested a strong desire to enter the army—a wish which had evoked from his father an unusual

firmness of opposition. He had a feminine shrinking from war, and dim as his moral sight was when his boy was concerned, could not fail to perceive that the perils of an officer's life in time of peace, were even more subtle and dangerous to such a character. So he warmly approved of this new scheme, and advised that arrangements should be made with his solicitors, Messrs. Wynch and Greville at once.

But this was not what Percy had meditated, and the idea of an office's restrictions, almost made him abandon his legal project altogether.

"I don't want to be a solicitor," he said, "I'd much rather be a barrister, my idea was, to take chambers in London, and study law there. I could have the best assistance of course, seeing you make me so liberal an allowance; then in a year's time, I shall be able to take any definite step you think best."

A slight shadow passed across Mr. Fenwood's face: the plan was rather a vague and indefinite one, and he could not repress some silent misgiving as to its result; still "studying law" had a consoling sound, and suggested gravity, dili-

gence, and forensic erudition. So the plan was finally agreed to, and a week afterwards he had left his son installed in handsome chambers, within easy reach of the law courts, armed with all the legal works the solicitors had proposed; and what was more to the purpose in Percy's judgment—ample funds.

Shortly after his father's return to Seafern Hall, an incident occurred which wrought a decided change in that establishment; and is of too idyllic a character to be omitted here. A certain Glasgow merchant, who bore the pleasing name of Donald McTurgot, had occasion to visit the Hall, upon some affairs of business. Although they were rather unimportant in character, they necessitated several conferences with Mr. Fenwood, and gave him an excellent opportunity of observing the discretion with which Miss Gordon managed the domestic concerns. New ideas rarely occurred to Mr. McTurgot, his mind being constituted on unelastic principles; and the store of thoughts which he had accumulated in his boyhood, seeming to him sufficient for all the exigencies of life; but whether the bracing air of

Seafern quickened the tardy current of his reflections, or more inscrutable causes were at work; the conviction took strong possession of him, that to transplant Miss Gordon to his northern home, would materially increase his daily comforts. He proceeded to ascertain with considerable trouble and ingenuity, the salary which Mr. Fenwood was giving her; and learned practically thereby, that knowledge is often synonymous with sorrow, for the amount was far greater than he had anticipated. But minute calculation convinced him, that he could offer a small advance on this; and yet reserve for himself a balance of profit. He was again disconcerted, for Miss Gordon received his proposals with curt denial, saying, that she was perfectly comfortable at the Hall; and could not forget the kindness she had received there. At this Mr. McTurgot felt not only the annoyance of being foiled in an enterprise, but the disappointment with which one discovers unsuspected weakness, in a character one admires. At this moment however, a passing tramp ventured to solicit alms from that lady, quite unconscious of the delicate matters he was interrupting; and her

refusal was so laconic and uncompromising, that she immediately recovered the high place in the merchant's estimation, of which her betrayal of feeling, had momentarily robbed her. Accordingly he went back to the inn where he was staying, and at once plunged into further calculations, more profound than those which had occupied his attention before. The result was apparently satisfactory, for when the waiter brought in his supper, he heard him distinctly chuckle, and murmur something about saving a salary, the meaning of which the inquisitive official was unable to comprehend.

Mr. McTurgot arrayed himself next morning with unwonted care; for he had a dim idea that the only novel he had ever read had associated imposing raiment, with a wooer's certainty of success. Clad in this impressive manner he proceeded to the Hall, and with scarcely any preface, asked Miss Gordon whether she had any objection to marrying him. It has been remarked that a maiden always intuitively detects when she is beloved; but perhaps Mr. McTurgot's devotion was scarcely passionate enough to awaken such

delicate sensibilities ; or perhaps his proposal of the day before, had dispelled her suspicions of any more tender relationship between them. Be this as it may, it was certain that she was unprepared with a reply, expressed surprise, and asked for a few days' consideration.

The subject presented itself to her in a thoroughly practical light — Mr. McTurgot's mental capacity was not brilliant, but it was decidedly shrewd, he was not very young, but then neither was she; and if his baldness was unpoetical, it certainly could not be regarded as a moral offence. She was contented with her present position but Mr. Fenwood's death might any moment deprive her of it, while this arrangement offered the prospect of a good and durable social position. Mr. McTurgot was respectable and respected—an elder in his church—a man esteemed by his banker, and not disliked by herself. Opposing considerations pressing for a division, "the Ayes had it;" and Miss Gordon's consent was won, a circumstance which so delighted the successful lover, that coming close to her, he went through some unaccountable manœuvres

with his arms, (supposed by Alice who happened at that moment to enter the room to be intended for a caress); and on arriving again at the inn, actually bestowed twopence upon the Boots—an impulsive folly which he subsequently regretted.

“Romances paint our wooings at full length,
But only give a bust of marriages;”

so the sequel may be briefly told. In a few weeks time the necessary arrangements were made—Miss Gordon was married and Seafern Hall knew its directress no more.

Mr. Fenwood proposed to Alice that she should have another companion, but this offer she declined; not that the unbroken solitude was congenial to her, but because she knew the shrinking from new faces, and dislike of deviation of any kind, from the normal course of life (always a characteristic of Mr. Fenwood's mind) had lately gained a deeper power over him. Penetrating into the sterile recesses of his library, she had found some old monkish works; and their perusal had left a shadow of ascetic feeling upon her. It was only a shadow, for from the extreme of such

ethics she was saved by her youth, her splendid constitution, and her strong common-sense; but that the idea of self-sacrifice has in it something of irresistible fascination all history proves; and her solitary musings had ended in disgust at the purposeless selfishness of her life; and a vague longing to prove by suffering that her powers of devotion, whether inspired by a person or a cause, were neither fitful nor insignificant. There is something in this unselfish enthusiasm constraining admiration, in a world whose inmates are mostly dull and indifferent; but the mood is a dangerous one; for whenever feeling reduces judgment to slavish submission, it is always probable that the voluntary abnegation of self may be uncalled-for and in vain.

At present, however, this instinct could take no form, but quiet consideration of others—notably in ministry to Mr. Fenwood, whose sight was growing weaker, and who gave many other indications of failing health. Therefore Alice became his amanuensis, assisted him in making intricate and purposeless calculations, and read to him from books whose meaning she could not

understand. As a natural consequence, the fondness he had already conceived for her deepened daily; and her presence came to be the chief necessity of his life. The old idea which had been supreme there for nearly twenty years could not be displaced; but it blended with the new one, and whenever he thought of Percy he always associated him with Alice.

Letters from London to his bitter disappointment, were irregular and brief; containing little information concerning the writer's life. There was indeed not much to tell of any creditable nature; and the details, such as they were, need not be traced much more fully here. Of course he soon ceased even the pretence of study, and gave himself up to the more agreeable pursuit of pleasure. For this chase the world is not a convenient hunting-field, for the prey is not easily overtaken, and the roads by which it is followed are often rough and hard. Percy was guilty of no grave excesses, and shrank instinctively from all coarse forms of vice; but he was indolent and irresolute, and the society of Henry Drummond and men like him, was not calculated to mature sterner and stronger qualities.

Drummond as he appeared unmasked, in confidential intercourse with a gambler, claiming a larger share of the plunder, and making weak efforts to obtain it by boasting and bluster, became a scoundrel of far more address and ability when in Percy's society. It was his policy here to make himself agreeable, it was his purpose also to obtain the ascendancy over his companion; and in both objects he succeeded.

Nor was this strange, although on the surface it may appear so; he was not without a certain humour, and the younger man liked to be amused, he had an opulent fund of anecdote, and an experience not inconsiderable—he could be deferential and complimentary without being betrayed into the grossness of vulgar flattery; and Telemachus in modern days is apt to value society in precise proportion to the contrast which it affords to Mentor's good advice.

But he had one point of still stronger advantage, this he would probably have himself defined as his knowledge of character. It was in reality his keen perception of anyone's moral weakness. Nobler impulses and loftier desires—those pure flowers which the rank weeds of evil habits can

never quite eradicate in a disposition not naturally depraved—he could not realise; but no astute general ever ascertained with more certainty the weak places in a besieged citadel, than he the traits of character by which a skilful hand could best fulfil its schemes. In this way he had gauged accurately the possibilities of his easily-deceived dupe.

But he did not mar his intrigues by any impatience; no experienced angler would be in a hurry to land the fish he knows he has securely hooked; therefore, although he contrived to win several small sums of money (very convenient to him) in the course of their evenings at cards and billiards, he steadily dissuaded Percy from playing for higher stakes, and easily gained thereby the reputation of a generous and disinterested friend. He had detected in the young heir a strong craving for excitement; and by imperceptible degrees this was being narrowed to a fondness for play; if this affection for gambling could be trained into a passion his end was gained, and a few years might place a fortune in his hands.

Something of this plan, though not all, was clear to the eyes of Mary Ford. She knew already too well the look of careless hope and indecision, and its inevitable sequence of haggard disappointment; but she had never seen the former, or dreaded the latter before, in a face so striking as Percy Fenwood's. They had scarcely exchanged a dozen words, and on the solitary occasion he had spoken to her, the fact that she possessed no striking beauty, or indeed any attraction at all, except the brightness of her honest grey eyes, deprived his voice or manner of any significance, but he had awakened no common interest in Mary's mind, and she often pleaded with her father for some promise that no harm should come to him, only to be met with reassuring generalities and evasive replies.

Her position was not an easy one, for she could not warn him against Drummond without betraying her father also; and from this she instinctively recoiled. As she thought of this, and tried vainly to discover some course of action which should solve all the difficulties that so constantly perplexed her, her face grew graver, and its wistful look of

disappointment became more readily perceptible as the months passed by.

And meanwhile Sydney was working manfully in pursuance of the determination he had avowed at Sunrise Peak. The pencil of his boyish fancy, at whose creative bidding palaces and cathedrals, castles, mansions, and villas were to spring into form, as if their builders had been Aladdin's servile genii, was only a memory; but hard work is a magician—slower and less dazzling, but potent still, and by persistent effort day and night he was gradually achieving for himself the unpoetical but very necessary prize of an independent position.

And whatever was his occupation he never lost sight for a moment of the fair face shaded by its wealth of bright brown hair, which he had studied so minutely as they rowed together over the lonely sea.

CHAPTER XII.

Full many a lady
I have eyed with best regard ; and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage
Brought my too diligent ear.

THE TEMPEST.

IN this manner the time passed by until within a week of Percy's twenty-first birthday, when he received a letter from his father strongly urging him to spend it at home. The wish was so natural, that he could scarcely have refused it under any circumstances ; but at that moment in spite of his dislike to Seafern dulness, it agreeably accorded with his inclinations.

There were many reasons for this : in the first place he was not without natural affection, and recent accounts of his father's failing health, had more than once half decided him to return home without waiting to be asked—he had not so grossly exceeded his allowance, as to fear confidence on this point resulting otherwise than in providing him with a generous paternal cheque ; and he was

rather ashamed of continuing the form of law study, when half an hour's conversation with his father, would end the undesirable dissimulation.

But in addition to these motives, he had another less evident one. There is an Irish ballad in which the poet after modestly confessing his incapacity for the dull routine of labour—(a fact he ascribes to hereditary weakness) proceeds to declare in a more triumphant strain—

“ But I'd make a most illigant Turk,
For I'm fond of tobacco and ladies ; ”

and it is equally true that nicotine and feminine beauty, were potent influences in the life of Percy Fenwood.

As these transitory attachments exercised little effect on his life, either by visible results, or through the shadowy tyranny of memories, they have not been recorded in these pages. To state them briefly would be difficult, and to chronicle all their details would exhaust the patience of the most courteous reader : suffice it to say, that the maidens thus selected for devotion, were diminutive and tall, fair and dark, differing as widely in

character as in appearance ; and not always chosen from the same class of society. But the domain of Percy's affections, was never long without a queen, so that when by force of circumstances the throne was rendered momentarily vacant, he might well have adapted the old French proverb to the occasion, and said—" *La reine est morte ; vive la reine.*"

The last of these interesting episodes, which by a fine flight of fancy he called love, had been the apotheosis of a celebrated actress ; to whom he had never spoken, but whose fair face had led him to the perpetration of some bad verses—the only lyrical effusions of his life. But the enchantress moved apparently more by prudential considerations than romantic ideas, had recently married a banker ; and Percy awoke to the consciousness—not that the world was desolate and life dark, but that it was highly necessary to transfer his wounded affections to some one else. His father's letters had contained more than one allusion lately to Alice's improved beauty and many attractions ; she had herself written so amusingly on the subject of Mr. McTurgot's wooing, that her old play-

fellow began to think her society, by its bright individuality, might be a pleasant variation to his London life, which occasionally grew monotonous, like every other phase of mundane existence.

Thus he came to Seafern strongly prejudiced in her favour; and at the Hall it seemed as though no one could utter any name but hers. Now that Miss Gordon was not there to divide the responsibility, the servants of course looked exclusively to Alice for direction, and took no pains to disguise their satisfaction at the change; and from Mr. Fenwood (whose altered looks were only too evident even to Percy's careless glance), the words of greeting were immediately followed by lavish praise of her gentleness and devotion.

The impression thus commenced was continued unconsciously by Alice herself. He had left her two years before, still retaining something of the child in her appearance and thoughts—he found her a woman of rare beauty and subtle charm.

Employment of some kind is a necessity of human nature; and solitary captives have found in the drudgery of manual labour, the only refuge from madness and despair. Percy regarded Sea-

fern in the light of a prison, and the pleasantest occupation which occurred to him was to fall in love with Alice. This was favoured by their frequent rambles alone, when he found her so fascinating that he would probably have been compelled to offer her his homage, even if the black-haired actress had not bestowed her hand upon the middle-aged Croesus of Lombard Street; as it was, no haunting remembrance or opposing thought counteracted the gentle spell; and Mr. Fenwood observed with unfeigned delight, what seemed to him the near fulfilment of the project dearest to his heart.

He would have liked to have celebrated Percy's birthday with public rejoicings, which would be heightened by the announcement that the heir was soon to be married to a bride, dear to them from all the circumstances of her birth, as well as by her life in their midst. But the state of his health made excitement dangerous, and the day passed with no more striking event to mark its individuality than his birthday present—a liberal cheque which swept away all the clouds from Percy's financial horizon.

"I'm sorry you've grown tired of the law," he said, "but it's no use your following an irksome occupation. It's true I never had a profession myself, but then I married, and that makes a man settle down quite as effectually. When I die, and I can't hide from myself that my strength is failing, I should feel happier if I knew something definite of your probable future. Have *you* ever thought of marriage?"

The question was an unexpected one, and came to Percy with all the force of a sudden solution to a troublesome problem. His attachments had been so boyish in character, that he had scarcely ever contemplated their having so practical and important a consummation. If the suggestion had been made during the reign of the tragic actress, or while some other maiden equally discordant to the drowsy propriety of Seafern Hall held dominion over him, he might have repudiated it with a direct negative; but seeing at that moment (by the law of circularity which so strongly pervades the world), the centre of his imagination was his childish playfellow, the brightness of this new idea seemed unalloyed. It would be pleasant to

gratify his father, who was always generous and indulgent, often as Percy had thwarted his wishes—it would be agreeable to give Alice the most tangible proof of affection which it was in a man's power to bestow, to make her mistress of a beautiful home, where she could never know an unsatisfied caprice; and it would be delightful to exchange the haunting ideas of tape and parchment for a fair young wife, and the possession of unlimited money. Therefore he gave an eager acquiescence to his father's proposal, and was relieved to find his choice was already known and warmly approved.

People who only knew Mr. Fenwood as he appeared in ordinary intercourse—listless and abstracted, with no apparent strength of feeling on any subject that might be discussed, would have been startled at the light-hearted animation with which he commented on Percy's confidence. The closing days of his life would be brighter than any which had preceded them—lit up by a sunny gladness that would cast no shadow of regret. They would have a gay wedding—the fitting prelude to the long years of happiness which were to succeed it.

“You shall have as much money as you want,

my boy; for you must have a home worthy of Alice, and you will find a corner in it for me, I know—I shall not need it long.”

“But Alice may not consent,” said Percy, “you are forgetting that.”

Mr. Fenwood glanced at his son’s handsome face with a smile of incredulity, “she will not refuse you,” he said, “few girls would do that I fancy; and Alice has always been fond of you—she talks to me of hardly anything else.”

Next morning at breakfast he said—

“Have you heard anything of your friend Mayfield lately?”

“Not much, we dine together now and then, but his office is in another part of the town, and he has been working so hard that we rarely have the opportunity to meet—I’ve been intending to write to him for weeks past.”

At this moment a servant entered the room with the morning’s letters—three or four for Mr. Fenwood, two for Percy, and one for Alice.

Percy saw at a glance that one was from Henry Drummond, and hastily put it in his pocket unopened, lest its presence should provoke any

disagreeable inquiries; he recognised in the address of the other letter the handwriting of an old schoolfellow, and unceremoniously began its immediate perusal. Mr. Fenwood after peering in his dim-sighted fashion at the outside of his own communications, and perceiving that they related merely to unimportant business, threw them aside to await his leisure. Alice's letter was from Mrs. McTurgot, and she felt no burning anxiety to read its contents. That excellent lady was not without gifts as a correspondent—her English was always graceful and accurate, her style agreeable and lucid; but she had one decided fault in this matter—she never wrote on subjects which could possibly interest any one, not possessing a mind so frigidly constituted as her own.

“Really,” said Percy breaking the silence, “this is a coincidence; my letter is from Morris—he is an old schoolfellow of mine you know, and here's a lot in it about Mayfield. He says—but I'll give you his exact words.”

As the letter was a long one, and very untidily written, Percy was some time in finding the passages he referred to. At the mention of Sydney's

name, Alice had felt the hot blood flush her cheek and brow, and was glad of the opportunity now given her to recover her self-possession.

“‘I have a whole budget of news for you about Mayfield,’” Percy read aloud, “‘he has made tremendous strides in his profession, as you always said he would, and I hear on the best authority that old Halliday is going to take him into partnership. I thought that a tolerable staggerer; but its nothing to the next point. He is engaged to be married, and to whom do you suppose? to no other than Miss Ada Somers—one of the prettiest girls in London as you know, and an heiress in the bargain. Really the luck of some fellows is positively aggravating; and I believe both you and he were not only born with silver spoons in your mouths, but grasping in your hands the title deeds of extensive gold mines. If Fortune were not as blind as Justice, she would have selected more deserving objects for her generosity—myself for instance; but after all I am glad the fair prize (she must be worth twelve hundred a year at least) has fallen to so good a fellow as Sydney. I don’t think my disposition

is an envious one, though I wish I had a few more trump cards in my hand; I believe Mayfield's secret is that indomitable will of his—there was a certain look he had, I often noticed it at school, which was the sure prophecy of success—you must know the expression I mean. I saw it in his face just before he licked your old enemy Mudson, and another time when he saved us from losing a cricket match by one of his finest scores. Now for my own part, but you don't care a straw for Morris's egotism so there the quotation may end.' ”

“Do you know the young lady?” Alice spoke rather more slowly than usual, and her face—flushed a moment before—had grown very pale; but neither her voice nor her manner betrayed any special feeling.

“Oh yes, I know her very well—she is just the girl for Mayfield; to say nothing of her fortune, which seems to impress Morris so much; she is decidedly accomplished, and rather clever—I knew long ago that she admired him, but I never suspected that he cared for her.”

This needed no reply, and received none. Breakfast being over, Alice took the first opportunity

to escape from the room ; the careless words had seemed to her like the chilling vibrations of a knell—she wanted to be alone, to question her own heart, to face the altered future, and to see if the suddenly overcast horizon was illumined by a ray of hope. The rapid course of her thoughts, demanded corresponding physical activity, and the narrow boundaries of the house seemed to her excited fancy like an inexorable prison. Hastily putting on her hat and gloves, she hurried through the grounds, and reached the high road leading from the beach. At that moment she dreaded the companionship of the waves, with their desolate and unceasing murmur ; for the sea by which she had played from infancy, and for which she had a half-pagan reverence, was the faithful mirror of her moods ; and on the rare occasions like the present, when they were desponding and apprehensive, its song had in it a tone of terror. Besides she felt this morning the unpitying waters, linked by her father's death with her own destiny, were the grave of much that had once been strong and beautiful ; and suggested a dread analogy to the great ocean of life, beneath whose relentless

current hopes and dreams were always sinking silently, never to rise again. Nature had no sympathy for her—that was clear; for the sunshine flooded the world that glad spring morning, and the fragrant breath of the May upon the hedges seemed to mingle in mystic marriage with the unstudied music which the lark, the thrush, and the blackbird were flinging with lavish wealth of art upon the air.

Alice felt no comfort from all this, she only saw in the dusty road an emblem of her own life—a long vista of hopeless monotony. The road if patiently followed led at last to meadow and woodland; and in like manner she had fancied a day before, her unvarying experience would mature into a life of bright activity and love—now it seemed as though every fair belief must of necessity be a mirage. With a vague consciousness of all this, but with no perception definite enough for deliberate opposition, she walked rapidly on until she was stopped by the sound of her own name, and looking round saw Percy doing his best to overtake her, without resorting to the undignified and discomposing method of running.

His voice was not unmusical, and it had a tone of ringing gaiety very pleasant to hear; but at that moment it seemed to her harsh and grating. She wanted to be alone, and felt in no mood for light words or verbal fencing; but she had no alternative except submission to the inevitable, so she waited for him to come up, and made a faint ineffectual attempt at a smile of welcome. It is difficult for imperfect human nature to retain its unruffled serenity, when an absurdly trivial incident interrupts the course of earnest thought; but the world is so constituted as to make it a necessity. The poet wandering in an ideal fairy-land, with "his eye in a fine frenzy rolling" must fix the unsettled optic upon the contemplation of reality, if the collector calls for the water-rate—the metaphysician must end his rambles through labyrinths of casuistry, when his wife announces that the baby manifests alarming symptoms of convulsions—and the young girl in whose heart an unsuspected tragedy of passionate feeling is being enacted, must satisfy the requirements of society, and smile at drawing-room platitudes, as though their insipidity were delightful to her.

"What a chase you've given me," exclaimed Percy laughing, "you deserve to be called the Queen of the Winds; for I've seen you row as though a hostile Armada were pursuing you; and just now you were walking as if you wished to go 'anywhere—anywhere out of the world.' I called two or three times before you heard me."

Alice made an evasive reply, and they walked on together—he talking in his gay careless fashion and she answering by judicious monosyllables. From this the conversation imperceptibly took a graver tone, Percy was really anxious about his father's health, and the doctor had distinctly told Alice that the end might be very near, he was prematurely old, and his son remarked with a touch of self-reproach, that he had not had much happiness in his life.

"I don't fancy any one has," said Alice rather bitterly. "I know nothing of cities, and little enough of men and women; but so far as I can see, life means simply the constant repetition of petty trials and small annoyances, and when the monotony is disturbed, it is only by the cruel hand of pitiless change."

"You are growing cynical, Alice. There are a lot of things in the world one would wish otherwise—bores for instance, and duns; but it isn't a bad world after all."

"I wonder how long you will hold this faith—you will learn a sterner creed when you come to care for anything deeply."

"Dear Alice, I do care for something deeply—I care for you. You challenge my creed of happiness, and I answer, let us join hands, and prove it true together."

The wistful sadness in her face changed suddenly to one of dread—

"I do not understand you," she said; "if you are jesting, choose some idler theme than life to play with."

"But I was never more in earnest—I know you think me idle and careless, but I can love as deeply as other men, who use graver words. Years ago when we were children together, you consented to be my wife, and now I want the woman to seal the promise of the child. I have come back like the knight in your ballad, Alice, with the trifling exception"—(Percy could never sustain an earnest

conversation for many minutes) "that I have brought no trophies with me. In plain Saxon, darling, I love you. Let us go home together, and gladden my father's heart by telling him we have determined never to separate again."

They had reached an old rustic seat by the way, and at the first words of his appeal Alice had sat down, and covered her face with her hands. When she looked up her eyes were very bright, but there were no tears in them, although there was a sadness in her expression he had never seen before.

"Percy," she said firmly, "this can never, never be, we can no more renew our childish promises than we can make the world look again what it seemed to our baby eyes; you and I are unlike in disposition, in belief, and in life experience. I never forget—and there is no act of kindness which you or your father have ever shown me which time can erase from my remembrance. Your grateful friend I will be always; but your wife—never."

There was a strength and womanly dignity in her manner, against which the fitful force of his boyish passion was powerless to contend. She had

never looked so beautiful as now he thought, and opposition made the slight feeling he called love, temporarily approximate to a higher conception of it: he replied by some weak words of further persuasion; and the assurance, which he doubtless believed genuine, that earth had no ambition for him apart from her. She shook her head—

“Dear Percy, a month will teach you that the world has a thousand prizes better worth winning than a simple village girl. Some day you will find a wife better suited to you—someone who is more your equal in birth and fortune; and when you bring her to your beautiful home, nobody will be warmer in congratulation than I.”

And without giving him time to reply she touched his forehead with her lips and left him.

The malignant fates seemed to have conspired to prevent her from indulging in undisturbed thought; for when she arrived at the Hall there were many trifling domestic duties which must be at once attended to: these she mechanically executed, and at length escaped to the quiet of her own room. The news of Sydney's approaching marriage had fallen upon her like a sombre

shadow; but now she was menaced with troubles which took a more definite outline. A woman usually has some pride and triumph in the proffered homage of a man she likes, even though her own heart is incapable of responsive feeling; but Alice had read Percy's character too clearly for this. She knew well his inconstant susceptibility, upon which impressions were lightly made, and easily effaced. Sydney's heart was of sterner fibre, and she only half believed this cruel rumour; although she argued to herself that she had never been worthy of his love—that in this gay brilliant London she had never seen, there must be many girls who surpassed her in everything, so that his words at Seafern, viewed by the light of their bright eyes, might seem only a boyish folly, which could not be seriously regarded.

And thus while she wavered between hope and fear, her thoughts wandered back again, with a dreary sense of apprehension, to the words she had heard that morning in her interrupted walk. Her answer had been dictated by instinctive emotion, and the clinging to old ideas; but with calm thought came a waning confidence in her own

firmness. She dreaded protracted opposition—she shrank from the prospect of isolation, which must inevitably follow her continued determination to thwart Mr. Fenwood's plans ; he had been kind to her, and the regard awakened by gratitude had been deepened by constant ministry on her own part, until she had come to think of him almost as a father. It would be hard to be watched with altered eyes ; and spoken to in changed tones—harder still to bear a silence which meant a mute reproach—to dread any allusion to the subject he loved best, and to experience a growing consciousness, that the home which in her need had sheltered her, wanted her no more—that her presence was the result not of choice, but necessity.

She feared all this, but the darkest danger in her eyes, was that this force of opposing circumstances might ultimately prevail—that her strength of resolution might prove unequal to the struggle.

CHAPTER XIII.

Close up his eyes and draw the curtain close ;
And let us all to meditation

KING HENRY THE SIXTH.
(Part II.)

PERCY watched Alice's retreating figure till he could see her no more ; then he drew a cigar case from his pocket, and began to smoke. The action was not particularly heroic, nor precisely indicative of the reckless despair which according to all conventional precedent, should take possession of a rejected lover's soul ; yet at that moment, he really experienced an unwonted depth of feeling. The unattainable has always a fascination, which the objects within easy grasp entirely lack ; and the child crying for the moon, unconsciously typifies the whole course of human ambition. There had been a grace and dignity too in Alice's demeanour, which had made him think of her with a new respect ; and although there was little of the hero worshipper in his constitution, he was quick to detect, and even admire any

mental or moral superiority. Then his unambitious nature having seldom seriously striven, had rarely failed; and of all defeats, a woman's refusal is the most disconcerting to a man's pride. Yes—viewed from every standpoint, Alice's decision was disagreeable, and Percy hated unpleasant things: this was the only conclusion he could arrive at, as rising from the seat, he threw away the end of his cigar and slowly returned home.

He found his father waiting for him in the library with some impatience; and anticipating inquiry said briefly—

“I have spoken to her, and she has refused me.”

The glad expectation in Mr. Fenwood's face, changed for a moment into a look of surprise and disappointment; but his confidence was too deeply rooted to be crushed by a single check, and he answered—

“You must be mistaken—her words may have been dictated by coquetry or reserve, or fifty other motives which will yield to persuasion. I have not so utterly forgotten the time when I was your age, as to remember nothing of women, and I tell you they like being wooed, and often pretend to

be indifferent to the things they care for most. There's something in the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' to this effect; but it's a long while since I read Shakespeare, and I don't know the exact words."

Mr. Fenwood referred to this vaguely remembered passage, as though he were quoting a legal precedent, which conclusively established his case. Percy assented to the general proposition, but questioned its special application: his sanguine temperament however, could not but be encouraged by the confident tone with which his father prophesied, that when he had spoken to Alice, and calmly reasoned with her on the subject, she would offer no further opposition to their wishes: it was decided moreover, that they should both ignore the topic until the morrow.

So at lunch and dinner, Alice was spared the attack she dreaded. She would have been greatly relieved by Mr. Fenwood's unaltered kindness, if she had not instinctively felt, that it sprang from a belief in her ultimate compliance. As it was, Percy's assumption of ease failed to make her comfortable—she was playing a part, and knew

she was proving herself an indifferent actress. After dinner she pleaded a headache—which was true enough—and accepted as a valid excuse for her early retirement to rest. The words seemed a mockery, for no rest that night was hers—she lay awake haunted and wearied by conflicting ideas; and arose next morning with no conclusion, but that the path before her was a hard and difficult one; and must be trodden without help or counsel. The last thought had for years been almost the greatest sorrow of her life, and these recent events had acutely awakened fresh consciousness of it; as an old wound throbs with new refinement of torture when struck by carelessness, or chilled by exposure. A friend is one of the primal necessities of our nature, not only for the daily needs of companionship; but to bind the wounds of sorrow—to nourish the drooping life of faith, and to become a guide and teacher by the divine strength of love. Such friendship Alice had never known, and there was much latent force in her disposition, which had consequently remained undeveloped—with many possibilities of her nature of which she herself was scarcely conscious.

At breakfast there was little conversation—Mr. Fenwood said nothing—Percy read his letters, and only made occasional remarks; while Alice was too grateful for the refuge of silence, to disturb the general quiet.

“Morris was quite right about Mayfield,” said Percy carelessly, believing that he was starting a safe and indifferent subject, “two other fellows, in another set altogether, tell me about his engagement, this morning. They say that whenever he is not slaving at old Halliday’s, he is with Ada Somers; so I suppose the next thing on the cards will be his marriage—Seacroft thinks so, and he tells me he got the news from the young lady’s cousin.”

Alice was already beginning to regard the post as a channel for painful intelligence, and she had schooled herself too carefully for a second betrayal of feeling; but the words seemed to crush the last hope remaining in her heart—she had not believed the assertion until now, and to accept it was like renouncing faith and memory; but the chain of probabilities had not one missing link she thought; and it was idle to persist in reject-

ing what was declared by every voice to be true. When Percy left her alone with his father, she did not attempt to follow him, for she knew the interview must come sooner or later ; and it was not in her nature to shrink from an ordeal, or to find anything but torture in suspense.

"Alice," said Mr. Fenwood suddenly, as if waking from a dream, "come and sit beside me—I want to speak to you dear, about something that lies very near to my heart."

She obeyed him silently, looking anxiously into his face, and reading nothing but gentleness and sympathy there : it would be hard to see its expression alter to one of anger or disappointment ; yet she would almost have welcomed such severity, for with that she felt she could cope ; but this tenderness in a man whom her gratitude invested with power, was less easy to resist. He stroked her hair thoughtfully—an unwonted action for him, in whose unimaginative existence caresses had no part, then he said—

"Years ago when you were a pretty child, Mr. Ellis told me the day might come when your companionship would be precious to me—you have

verified his words Alice, over and over again ; if I have failed to show this, you must forgive me."

"*I*," she answered quickly, "I forgive, what have I to remember but continued goodness and kindness little deserved? I would gladly prove to you that I am grateful."

"I will not use your words against you," he said, "although I have an appeal to make. My life has been narrow and selfish I know ; but lately I have felt it quickened by new and transforming influences. Whether you are the cause of this, or the development of Percy's life has forced reflection upon me, or whether it is merely the dying effort of a flame, which leaps up with new energy before it expires, I cannot tell ; but this I know, if the past could be mine once more, I would use it differently ; if Percy could be a boy again, he should not with my consent, have the same training."

She had never heard Mr. Fenwood speak in this way before, although she had noticed in him lately a stronger interest in many things, than he was accustomed to manifest. He went on to say—

"For me to indulge in retrospect is idle ; I am

thinking to-day less of the past than the future. I know I have not long to live, and when I am gone what will become of Percy? His heart is good—his abilities above the average—his emotions all kindly; but he lacks decision and strength of purpose. Under the right influences his life might be all that even I could wish; but if these are wanting, I cannot hide from myself the grave possibility of danger. Dear Alice, I am anxious for you too; you have always lived in this little village, and you don't know how rough and cold the great world is outside. Percy loves you—I can see no future for you so hopeful as that of his wife; if this dear wish of mine were realised, I believe your influence would make him not only kind and gentle, but noble and good; and for myself (though I recognise no right of claim in this matter, and I wish you to act according to the free dictates of your heart), the last days of my life will be happier and more contented than any that have preceded them, if my daughter by love and adoption becomes my daughter in fact as well."

Alice's head had been bowed upon her hands

while he was speaking, and she had been trying to muster strength to tell him everything, and to plead to be exempted from the pain of further entreaty; but as he uttered the last words, her quick ear detected a change in his tone, and looking up anxiously, she said—

“Mr. Fenwood, you are ill—this conversation has excited you too much; shall I call Percy, or send for the doctor?”

“No—no; but we’ll not talk any longer now—you shall give me your answer to-morrow. I am tired, and will try to rest a little.”

He leaned heavily upon her arm as he walked across the room to the sofa. This tendency to sleep at all times in the day was no new symptom, and did not alarm her, so after readjusting his cushions and doing what else she could for his comfort, she sat quietly beside him until he fell asleep. Then she went noiselessly to the door, and said to a servant who was passing—“Is Mr. Percy still in?”

“Yes, miss.”

“Tell him I should be glad to see him, if you please.”

In a little while Percy entered the room, and Alice briefly told him Mr. Fenwood was not quite so well, and she would like him to go at once for the doctor. The necessity of this, however, was obviated by the arrival of the doctor himself, who waited until his patient awoke, and then stayed with him a long time in conversation.

"There is no cause for immediate alarm," he said to Percy and Alice, who were waiting in the adjoining room; "but you must refrain from speaking to him on any exciting topics. I should like, if you have no objection, to telegraph for a London physician, though I repeat that I anticipate no sudden change."

This was of course agreed to, and Alice having ascertained she could be of no further use, and thinking her presence at that moment might induce the continuance of his former thoughts, and so needlessly agitate him, left Percy with his father, merely stipulating that she should be called if anything arose for her to do.

If she had felt the need of a friend before, when her mind had been animated by the strength of a distinct purpose, she was conscious of a double-

necessity now that the very foundation of her resolve was undermined. She could doubt the cruel news no longer in the light of this additional confirmation: Sydney had forgotten her, and cast from him the thought of her loyalty as a worn-out trifle, which had served its petty purpose, and was of no further worth. Yet so precious to her was the knowledge he had loved her once, that if she had been free, she could have been content with the remembrance of the few words he had spoken as they watched the sunset together two years ago.

But she was *not* free. The fetters of memory had been forged by the slow hand of time, and Mr. Fenwood's words had revealed to her the full consciousness of this. Had she not been longing for the possibility of some ideal sacrifice of self? and now that she was confronted by the reality was she to confess her wish a girlish sentiment, and shrink from the mere probability of pain? The monkish oracle she had recently consulted told her when life offered two paths for choice, the drearier always was the safer. She had not absolutely accepted this, and was vaguely conscious that self-sacrifice might at length merge into

moral suicide; but she was young, inexperienced, and quite alone.

Half-mechanically she unlocked one of the drawers in a cabinet Mr. Fenwood had given her, and saw the only relic of her childhood before she entered the Hall—the decapitated doll. The tears fell fast as she looked at the childish treasure. “If they had only left me to such toys as these,” she thought, “I might have known no harder troubles than rough living and scanty fare. Now the world seems very dreary; if I marry Percy, what hope is there for me but wealth for which I care nothing, and a love that may soon die, or which, if it lives, will only remind me of someone else far dearer, who spoke to me tenderly once? And yet, how can I thwart the wishes of the man who has the best right to my gratitude and obedience? And at this moment, perhaps, Sydney is with *her*, and if he knew of all this he would most likely say, ‘Act as I have done, forget the childish folly of long ago, and be wise.’ Ah! this love is cruel; it makes life brilliant and beautiful for a little while and then leaves it desolate for ever.”

She wondered, with the incredulity of a young heart, if others had ever suffered like this—if the death of cherished hopes was a necessity of life, or only an accident possible to it. Perhaps her ignorance of the world had caused her to form erroneous ideas of the true relationship between husband and wife; and the affection she had for Percy was not small compared to the regard of most of the married people she had known. The village too, was no Arcadian paradise, but a place composed for the most part of homes where the men spoke roughly to their wives, and the women complained constantly of trials and privations. If Alice had oftener visited their cottages she might have found encouragement for ideals beneath this unpromising exterior; if she had seen how sorrow could soften the hard features, she might have been compelled to admit that the spirit of poetry was there, although the coarse drudgery of poverty had banished its form. As it was, she had no such perception to sustain belief, and if it had been otherwise the bright reality was not for her. She had loved once with all the strength of her womanhood; but that was over now—never

to be recalled. And yet while she told herself this, her heart was as loyal as it had ever been; love in women like Alice is always immortal, but to such natures duty, or a tyrannical shadow wildly dreamed to be duty, comes often with a bitter edict of renunciation.

As she paced the room with thoughts like these, she started to see by the reflection in the mirror how pale and worn her face appeared. Whatever course she might ultimately adopt, it was absolutely necessary she should hide her struggles and maintain an outward calm. So she compelled herself to bestow the usual pains on her dress, carefully braided her rich brown hair, and went downstairs feeling (now that her appearance could excite no suspicion) little fear for her self-control.

The physician came in the evening—an elderly man, grave, unconcerned, and rather brusque in manner: the highest success in medical practice, while it may have no tendency to efface individuality, almost invariably generates these characteristics, and in the brief professional visits more is seldom betrayed. One other trait indeed, also common to his class must not be omitted—nothing escaped the observation of his calm grey

eyes, from the folds of Alice's dress to the quaint carving of the furniture, he saw all, and seemed to care for nothing. When he was admitted to the patient's room his attention became more concentrated, but the change was only one of degree. The case offered no unusual symptoms to render it scientifically attractive, and in the physician's mind the individual was nothing—the race was all. He confirmed the diagnosis of the family doctor—languid action of the heart, accompanied by impaired power in the respiratory organs; care might prolong life a few days, but the end would not be far off. This he told Alice, not unkindly, though with no attempt at disguise. Percy he rather ignored, and after a short consultation with the country practitioner (who endeavoured not to be elated at the great man's approval, but found it difficult to preserve an expression of fitting dejection) he returned to London.

All this while the patient had been unconscious, for about three hours before he had sunk into a kind of stupor, from which they had not attempted to arouse him. When at length he woke as if from sleep, it was only to utter a few

unimportant words, and then to relapse into his former condition; in this way he lingered with rare intervals of consciousness for five days, during which time Alice was his devoted nurse, taking no more sleep than physical exhaustion imperatively demanded. This ministry was wearying and anxious, but the unrest of body to some extent counteracted the disquietude of mind, and was far easier to bear. He recognised her more readily than anyone else, but seldom spoke, and then only to express some passing want which her quick hands had often already anticipated. But on the fifth day there was a change. Alice was the first to detect this, and immediately sent off not only for the doctor but for Mr. Ellis, who had several times called, but had never succeeded in being recognised. To the inexperienced eyes of the watchers round his bed, it was difficult to tell whether the alteration was an omen of good or evil; but it was in fact, the last effort of the mind to triumph over waning physical energy. When he spoke it was difficult to understand him, but Alice heard at last the faint articulation of her own name.

“Dear Mr. Fenwood,” she said, bending over

the dying man, "the only father I have ever known for fourteen years—is there anything you want of me?"

Again he strove to speak and failed, but the pleading in his eyes could not be mistaken. At that moment, awed at the near approach of death, and with nerves unstrung by protracted sleeplessness, she could deny him nothing.

"Can you hear me?" she whispered with slow distinctness.

The answer was plain, although no word was spoken.

"I understand your meaning, and I promise—I will be his true and faithful wife, till death shall separate us."

A faint smile played upon his pallid lips, she kissed them reverently, as men seal a sacred pledge—she had made her choice and would adhere to it, if to do so were to break her heart. As she stood there watching the white face, giddy with her long fatigue and the whirl of excited feelings, she heard Percy say, in a voice which sounded unlike his own—

"It is all over, Alice—he is dead."

CHAPTER XIV.

Were I but free, I would submit as soon
To pleading, as the stars; but Gratitude
Has built a prison round me; and the light
Falls through the narrow casement on the floor
In gleams of fitful pity:—one rash word
Has locked the heavy gate against the world,
And given the key to Death.

It is a remarkable fact that while men never jested so much as now, in no age of the world have they regarded life with such hopeless and jaundiced eyes. A comparison of modern literature with that of any preceding century, would abundantly prove that however humanity has gained in knowledge, it has lost the true buoyancy of its early youth. We do not live in tragical times: the fires of persecution have smouldered into impotence, merely asserting the existence of the spirit which kindled them, by the irritating but otherwise harmless smoke of verbal controversy: political oppression in Western Europe has given place to political indolence which, instead of producing a Tell or a Cromwell, only furnishes election agents with

pointed sallies on the hustings. The knightly lance has been superseded by the caricaturist's pencil—the nineteenth century sage is not a hermit but a satirist, and the minstrel finds that to sing love ballads and to recite battle legends, are less profitable employments than the composition of burlesques, parodies, and lampoons.

Amid all this noisy mirth the despairing undertone is never silent; and the indiscriminate mockery is like a sword-blade without a hilt, wounding most keenly the rash hand which strives to wield it. We love little, and reverence less; so our laughter has no gladness in it, and all the plausible sophistry of self-deception cannot hide from us that our gaiety is but a paltry show.

Nothing can claim exemption from the universal scorn by virtue of its sacredness—not even death, until the moment when the dark shadow falls upon our own homes. Then however, we are forced to recognise that money-changing and masquerading are not exactly the objects for which we were sent into the world—that the few years of mortal existence are only the first scene in the eternal tragedy of human life.

This is true in almost all cases, even when the cold hand has not been laid upon one greatly honoured and beloved. Mr. Fenwood had never been a man of wide sympathies, and with the exception of Percy and Alice, had gained the strong affection of no one. The loss of such men is lightly felt and soon forgotten; but for the present all the inmates of Seafern Hall felt vaguely the mysterious presence of Death—the air seemed heavier—the whole place changed, while the almost noiseless tread of the servants and their hushed voices were due not merely to consideration or the claims of respect, but tributes to indefinite feeling.

Mr. Ellis had arrived a few minutes after Mr. Fenwood's death, and with characteristic kindness had promptly relieved Alice of many painful duties.

"You are exhausted with watching, my dear Miss Easton," he said, "Percy and I will arrange matters—let me persuade you to go to bed."

"It is very early," she answered; the clergyman was firm, and she gladly availed herself of this opportunity to gain new strength for a conflict by temporarily forgetting it. She slept long and

dreamlessly, and awoke next morning much later than her usual hour for rising. The full consciousness of all that had happened soon returned to her, and she knew she had no longer to face uncertain difficulty or suspense, but the daily fulfilment of a sacred promise. The tints of earth and sky seemed dull and grey to her, as she went thoughtfully down the broad old-fashioned stairs; but she felt no temptation to flinch from the future—she was not disposed to exaggerate the burden of real sorrow by the weight of imaginary pain; and she was not without a certain sense of relief that doubt at last was over, and the decrees of duty clear. So she made no attempt to avoid Percy, who, glad to find her in this mood, and softened by the thoughts yesterday's scene had suggested, talked with her in a low tone, sometimes about his father and sometimes of the days when they were children together. To neither of them did that period seem very distant now, and Alice found herself lapsing into much of the old feeling, as though nothing had changed: she had always liked him—she knew that in his case the sorrow of natural affection was deepened by the bitterness

of self-reproach, as he recalled his long neglect of home, and faint recognition of his father's unselfish devotion; and sympathy softens much slighter regard into the semblance of truer emotion.

On the eve of the funeral Mr. Fenwood's friend and solicitor, Walter Greville arrived, bringing with him the will, which had been placed in his hands about a year before. The property it bequeathed amounted to about sixty thousand pounds; of this the sum of five hundred pounds was left to Mr. Ellis (probably in recognition of his share in bringing Alice to the Hall), and five hundred to him in trust for the poor of Seafern. The servants were to receive legacies varying from fifty to three hundred pounds, according to their length of service. To Alice, who was mentioned in terms of high praise and affection, the testator bequeathed three thousand pounds. Percy, who was joint executor with Mr. Greville, was residuary legatee; a small bequest to the latter being the only other claim on the estate.

This, couched with the tedious reiteration of legal form, the lawyer read in a dry, professional

tone after the funeral. All who were interested in it were present, and whatever may have been the feeling of unmentioned friends and relations in the outer world, no one there manifested any disappointment. Mr. Greville's hearers did not even feel surprise, with the exception of Mr. Ellis, who had anticipated no personal remembrance, and whose eyes brightened at the prospect of the help it would enable him to give to needy parishioners, in cottages where there was "little to earn and many to keep." Alice was touched by the allusion to herself, but she thought in her girlish way, as she was to marry Percy, it could make little difference to which of them the money should be left.

The work of executorship was not likely to be a difficult one, for the greater part of the property was invested in such a way as to admit of being easily realised, and the claims upon the estate were few. Mr. Greville's professional duties demanded his immediate return to London, where he was to arrange preliminary details, and advise Percy when his presence there would be required. After his departure, Seafern Hall, to a casual

observer, would have seemed to have resumed its normal aspect.

Of course Percy found much requiring his attention at home, and his constitutional indolence exaggerating every task into an ordeal, the help of Alice was in constant requisition. To watch her sorting papers—to hear an abstract of them in her clear sweet voice—to destroy some unimportant memorandum, or acquiesce in the suggestion that it would be well to preserve some scientific note or mathematical calculation; persuading himself all the while that he was performing colossal feats of labour—were occupations he found thoroughly congenial.

“Alice,” he said, one morning about a week after his father’s death, when they had been engaged in this way for some time; “I’m getting tired of work, and we’ve done a great deal to-day: put those papers aside now—I want to talk to you.”

“I think your life would be very empty, if any one robbed you of your favourite delusion that you are always working too hard,” she replied, with a smile, “but you have answered all my questions

very patiently, so I suppose I must be equally forbearing."

They had been much together the last few days, and their relationship was approaching more and more closely to that of their childish years; when they built sand castles on the beach—made plans for the future course of their lives, and discussed the safest schemes for resisting the aggressive, and undesired instruction of Miss Gordon.

"Alice," he said, after a brief pause, "the last time we had any earnest conversation, I told you how I loved you; but what I asked in return, you said could never be. Since then, many things have happened and I have dared to hope, after calmer thought you might give me a different reply. You know what my father wished, and *he* was dear to you, even if you care nothing for me. But I cannot believe that you have quite forgotten old days, and I want you to tell me that in spite of what you said when I spoke to you before, my first companion will be my last too; and make me very happy by her constant presence."

Alice did not blush or tremble—her decision was made—she had expected words like these, and

had prepared herself for them ; but there was one thing yet remaining for her to say, which might alter the aspect of everything ; and save her altogether from the effects of her promise. She tried to tell Percy about that evening at Sunrise Peak two years before, and the influence it had had upon her ever since.

“ You have a right to know this,” she concluded. “ and perhaps this confidence will make you content with my former answer to your question.”

For the first time since his father’s death, Percy laughed with genuine amusement.

“ My dear child,” he said, “ you don’t fancy I should think seriously of a passing girlish feeling like that. Of course you liked Sydney—most girls do ; you were only seventeen then, and he is as good as married now. To tell you the truth I’m rather glad to hear you’ve had an escapade of the kind ; for I’ve been in love five or six times myself, and it’s always pleasant to find a companion in transgression ; especially when it happens to be so fair a fellow sinner as you. Come darling, I only want one word from you—you know what that is.”

Alice felt that the last door of hope for her was closed: she could no more explain to him what love meant to her, than a musician could enable a person wholly without imagination, to understand the worlds of thought and feeling in which he wanders, while listening to the sublime conceptions of a great master; and for the same reason—he did not possess the faculty by which such emotions are comprehended.

“It is a poor thing for which you ask,” she said rather wearily, “a friendless girl with narrow and crude ideas—who has no knowledge of society and its ways—who was received in this house from charity, and has never aspired to become its mistress—who cannot even give you her heart’s first love; but I have promised, and if you care for my consent, it is yours.”

A faint perception that this was scarcely romantic—that a girl a little less at her ease would perhaps have been preferable, may have dawned on Percy’s mind; but he was not accustomed to deep thought, nor particularly discriminating in observation—acceptance of any kind was better than refusal, so he kissed her, and declared there was

no happier man in England than he. She submitted to the caress, but evinced none of the interesting agitation, conventionally ascribed to maidens whose hearts capitulate after an ardent siege.

"I wish my poor father had lived to see this," he said, "how it would have gladdened him. Of course we shall be married soon Alice—there's nothing to wait for. What do you say to three months from to-day?"

"Hardly so soon after your father's death," she pleaded—

"I don't see that need make any difference; if we wait much longer the summer will be over; and I hate the winter. Still, since you wish it Alice, and as people might chatter about want of feeling, and all that kind of thing, I don't mind making it six months; but I won't give you another day. We must live in London of course."

"Yes—I suppose you wouldn't care for Seavern."

Percy shuddered at the idea, and seeing that Alice, whose hand he had momentarily dropped, had taken advantage of the fact to resume her

work at the table, he ended this unpoetical wooing by leaving her; and strolled out into the grounds, for the enjoyment of the spring sunshine, and a cigar.

Perhaps Alice had cherished more hope than she had admitted to herself, of the effect which might be wrought by her confidence: at any rate his light dismissal of what was so deep a reality to her, had stung her into involuntary resentment. She went on sorting and arranging papers for a little while, finding the faint relief from mental unrest, which the mechanical performance of duty, rarely fails to give. At length however, having somewhat subdued the formidable disorder, she left the room to prepare for lunch.

On her way she paused before a painting which had lately possessed a new interest and meaning to her. It was the portrait of Percy's mother, painted by no indifferent master of realistic art; and as a child Alice had often passed it, with no deeper thought than wonder why the lady looked so pale and sad. Now as she stood attentively regarding it—her own beauty offering so striking a contrast to the delicate loveliness of the picture—

she was dreading lest the day might come when she would look like that. She wished she could learn what strange vicissitudes had given the eyes that depth of uncomplaining fortitude—and how a character so sensitive as the thin features indicated, had borne the rough handling of life. The face was a contradiction, for the mouth, though small and daintily formed, betrayed weakness and irresolution. This seeming anomaly, had always appeared to Alice to evince impotence in action, and quiet strength of patience—a combination not rare in women esteemed commonplace, who leave behind them no sign of the unsuspected tragedy of secret suffering, which has been enacted in their hearts.

“It is the embodiment of a woman’s endurance,” thought Alice; “it must be my lesson now, but it is very hard.”

She would probably not have thought it easier had she overheard a conversation between William Ford and Henry Drummond, which took place in the former’s house about a fortnight later.

“It’s all true, Ford,” began the younger man, “old Fenwood’s dead, and has left his son nearly

everything; just think of that hopeful young gentleman owning fifty thousand pounds, or thereabouts, while such men as you and I have to think about shillings. If I'd not had the advantage of pious instruction, I might be tempted to indulge in irreligious reflection; as it is, it's a consolation to know that social anomalies like this can be corrected. Money is a temptation, and I'm really too fond of this fortunate boy to let him long be exposed to it. You and I have waited long, confoundedly long; but all things have an end, and we shall be rich men in a couple of years, or I'm no prophet. Remember you owe everything to me, I introduced him; but generosity was always my weakness, and I'll be content with our original scheme of division."

"I think you'd better," replied the other quietly, vouchsafing no further answer to this oration.

"Always cool, even when Fortune is showering favours on you. I suppose you would advise forbearance, and leaving our confiding friend a handsome competence; especially as I hear he is going to be married."

Ford said nothing, but when he was once more

alone his face showed how deeply his confederate's words had moved him.

"Fifty thousand pounds," he said to himself, "what will men not do for that? In any class there would be a thousand candidates for the privilege of stealing or lying for such a prize. Drummond is a shallow knave, yet he has managed this well; but we will not ruin the lad, I'll take care of that, only I'm sick of this life, and this one success is absolutely necessary to me. Mary's rustic cottage may be a reality after all; poor girl, how grave she grows. If I sin, it is for her sake; and why should I consider a reckless boy more than my own daughter?"

And so the gambler, like many better and wiser men, lulled his conscience into fitful sleep by sophistry, and found no dupe so blind to reason as himself.

CHAPTER XV.

Since the years
Of uneventful childhood, life for me
Has worn a threefold aspect. First the days
When love lay dreaming 'midst caressing flowers;
And last the lonely future robbed of light.
Between them stands a moment fair and sad,
When eyes spoke hopeless love, and lips grew pale
Breathing a last farewell.

THE announcement of the approaching marriage between Percy and Alice met with varying comment in the village, but was received on the whole with unqualified approval, for the old prejudice against her as being debarred from respect by her plebeian birth, and from familiar intercourse by her distant bearing, had almost died away, and was soon to disappear altogether.

The weeks after Mr. Fenwood's death passed by less heavily than she had anticipated. It is not in the nature of healthful youth to suffer long from the mere apprehension of sorrow, and for the present the course of her life was not greatly altered. Percy divided his time between Seafern, the doubtful shrine of his heart, and London, the

less equivocal scene of his duties ; for as the task of executorship drew towards a close, the selection of a suitable house, and directions concerning repairs, alterations, and furniture, demanded attention. Of course he gave Alice all kinds of presents—elegant trifles, chosen with great taste, and invariably of no use whatever. She protested sometimes that a country girl had no need of such refined absurdities, but the luxury of giving, where the act involved neither trouble nor sacrifice, was too dear to Percy's careless good-nature for him to relinquish it. For the rest, when he was with her he did his best to make himself agreeable, and when he was away he wrote amusing letters. Alice took care not to ruffle the former intercourse by undue self-assertion, and replied to the latter, as far as she could, in the same strain ; so that he informed his acquaintances that "when you had the right sort of girl, being engaged was one of the pleasantest things in the world." The guiding thought of her life was no longer choice, but duty ; and the idea of swerving from it, now that it was clear, never occurred to her.

About this time the old sailor Datchby fell ill. For a long while, age and rheumatism had kept him from active work, but it now became evident that, as he himself expressed it, he was "on his last voyage, and pretty nigh to port." Under any circumstances, Alice's strongest sympathies would have been awakened by the waning energy of a man who was associated in many ways with her own history, and who had been one of her childish heroes ; but at the present moment, when she was clinging to old ideas, and feeling that her grasp of them must soon relax, she gave Datchby an affectionate care, which swept away all class distinctions. She would gladly have had him removed to the Hall, where he would have been within easier range of her help, but this the doctor would not permit, so that her constant presence at his cottage occupied all her leisure time, and precluded the possibility of morbid thought. All her care failed to produce any harvest but grateful recognition, and when at length the old man died, blessing her with his last breath, the villagers who had said the hardest things about her were compelled to admit that for all her fine ways and

pretty face "Miss Alice had nursed him as if he had been one of the gentlefolks, and seemed to feel it now that he was gone like as if he'd been her best friend."

Her frequent visits to the boatman's cottage naturally brought her into connection with other villagers, and in their homes also there was much requiring her kindly attention. Many of them were very poor, and she had both power and will to help them; they needed sympathy, too, and she gave it freely, for now that she must soon leave her old home for an untried and uncertain future, she felt a strong clinging to all she had once thought dreary and void of interest. Sorrow had already taught her to recognise something of the wider aspect of every-day existence; and beside this, the idealising haze through which we regard the past, softening its rugged outlines and hiding its unsightly asperities, is often cast over the present when we know that our possession of it will soon be over.

In this manner the spring passed away, and the greater part of the hot summer also. One evening at the end of August, after a busy day divided

between household cares and visits in the village, Alice took a book and started for one of her solitary walks. Perhaps she retained none of her childish characteristics more keenly than her susceptibility to the influence of cloud and sunshine, of wave and wind. The evening was so beautiful, its calm only ruffled by a light breeze (a most welcome visitor after the heat of the day) that Alice felt something like her old buoyancy of spirit revived. After all the world was very fair, whatever disappointments life might enfold; she could not be indifferent to all this beauty as she stood on the high cliff watching the reflection of the sunset on the bosom of the sea. At length, with a sigh of quiet enjoyment, she seated herself on a large stone which had probably rolled years before from a higher part of the cliff, and had been worn by repeated rains and the slow touch of Time into a somewhat fantastic shape, which had often excited her childish admiration.

The book she had brought with her was a tale of travels, written with more beauty of diction and grace of imagination than strict accuracy of detail; but Alice was not a critical reader, and in

her subtle appreciation of an exquisite description she became too absorbed to hear a light step rapidly approaching her; but at last, having to turn a leaf over, she happened to look up and seeing Sydney Mayfield standing close beside her, dropped the book and started to her feet, with an involuntary cry of surprise and pleasure.

He had taken advantage of her preoccupation to observe her face narrowly, to mark the heightened colour of her cheek, the clear outlines of her features, the beauty of her small mouth, which seemed to him indicative at once of tenderness and resolution, to admire the long dark lashes which shaded the loveliness of her downcast eyes, and the perfect symmetry of her finely-developed form. Surely, he thought, the years of absence must have dealt gently with her, since they had added to her wealth of grace and beauty.

"Miss Easton," he said, taking her hand, "I'm afraid I have startled you."

"I had no idea you were at Seafern," she replied, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Nor was I an hour ago. I called at the Hall and they told me you were walking in this direc-

tion, so I took the liberty of disturbing your reverie."

By a slight gesture he induced her to resume her seat, and stood beside her for a moment without speaking. She felt herself powerless to break the silence, and mistrusted her own self-control when the formalities of greeting should be over. At last he said—

"I only heard yesterday of Mr. Fenwood's death; the news surprised as well as pained me. He was never a strong man, but I did not anticipate so sudden an end to a life so quiet and uneventful. You would feel it deeply I know, and I have not forgotten his kindness to me."

"Yes, he was always good," said Alice mechanically, finding that he paused for her to speak.

"In any case," resumed Sydney, "I should have been here in a week or two. Do you remember the conversation we had together more than two years ago, the night before we parted?"

She inclined her head without speaking, for wild thoughts crowded on her mind at his words, like the manifold forms of torture experienced in a single

instant when a quivering nerve is ruthlessly laid bare. Had there been a single day when she had forgotten? had his words not been potent influences in the day-time, and fantastic dream-spectres at night?

“ Dear Alice,” he continued, “ I told you then that I went away to win the right to ask for your love—I have succeeded beyond what I dared to hope. The firm of architects I am with has been rich for many years, and the articles of agreement making me a partner only await my signature. Of course I could not give you a home like the one to which you have been accustomed, though even that may be possible some day. I left you free, and I dare not *claim* your promise, but if you will *give* it to me, now that you are woman enough to realise its full meaning, and my own future is a definite thing, I can speak without reserve. If I told you what you have been to me through all this weary time of separation—how your beauty has been the goal of all my efforts, never absent from my thoughts—if I spoke with unrestrained freedom of the love that has been the guiding impulse of my life, which has gained new

strength with the daily growth of my maturing manhood, and transformed the dull routine of every-day labour into knightly enterprise, of which a princess's love was to be the crown—I should be only uttering thoughts that had been with me day and night, but which might seem mere words to you. Darling, I told you my secret long ago. I love you better than anything else in the whole world—is this love to be my greatest sorrow, or my sweetest joy?”

She had tried more than once to interrupt him, but could not command her voice; now however, that he waited for her answer, she covered her face with her hands and cried in a piteous tone—

“Spare me, for God's sake—you will break my heart.”

Her words and manner alarmed him—in his large unselfish nature consideration for her had always been the first thought, and he would have watched his dearest hope perish without flinching sooner than give her the bitterness of unnecessary pain; but this agitation was incomprehensible to him, and the bewilderment seemed cruel and maddening.

.

"Have I wounded you, dearest?" he said tenderly, "do not fancy I construe your former gentleness into a promise; if you cannot return my love, I will not press it, though to abandon the hope of winning you is to change the whole world's face to me; but these tears are foreign to your brightness—take your hands away and let me see the fair glad face of Alice Easton once more before I go."

She obeyed him by a strong effort, but there was no gladness in her look—only the bitterness of one who knows that when the present agony is over, it will be to give place to the long weariness of silent pain.

"Why do you call me free," she asked, "when I am miserably bound? You, too—are there no memories to silence your words of love?"

"None," he answered without a moment's hesitation.

"It was not true, then," she said to herself, "I could not believe it for a long time, but proof seemed so conclusive."

"What are you speaking of?" he asked, finding her words as difficult to understand as her agitated silence.

"Of your engagement to Miss Somers."

Sydney stamped impatiently on the ground. "Has that senseless gossip travelled here?" he said, "I thought chattering acquaintances were only irritating—I never dreamed they could be fatal. Listen, and I will tell you how the idle rumour rose. Miss Somers has a brother, an old friend of mine, between whom and his father there was a bitter quarrel, ending in a separation. Miss Somers took her brother's part, and being debarred from any other mode of intercourse, communicated with him through me. Of course, this necessitated several rather long conversations between us, and once at an evening party she was betrayed, while believing herself alone with me, into some depth of feeling, which an unseen bystander was kind enough to credit me with causing, though in reality I had no more personal share in it than the King of Abyssinia. Does this explanation content you?"

"You do not blame me," she said sadly, "it is like you, but I blame myself, no appearances should have blinded me; as it is, one word from you is more than enough to sweep these clouds away; but there are sterner barriers than these between us."

She spoke more calmly now, but with a hopelessness of tone that he found harder to bear than her outburst of passionate feeling.

"What barriers can there be if we love each other? and if you had forgotten me you would not have spoken like this."

"I told you I was fettered," she answered simply, "I have done wrong in listening to you at all—in two months I am to be Percy's wife."

Sydney had not suspected this—he had imagined only difficulties which might be surmounted by patience and an inflexible will—that his old schoolfellow, indolent and vacillating always, should thwart him in a cherished life-purpose was a contingency of which he had never dreamed.

"Do you love him?" he asked quickly.

"We have been fond of each other since we were children," she answered evasively.

"You know what I mean; such women as you attach a widely different meaning to love than mere regard for a childish playfellow. Is he more to you than I have ever been?"

She was silent, but he repeated the question, and she said pleadingly—

“Do not compel me to reply. I cannot speak calmly to-night, and you are too generous to force unwilling confession from a helpless girl. I have promised to be his wife; I am bound by a pledge to the living, and a sacred vow to the dead. It is hard to bear the knowledge that you think me weak and fickle, but my lips are sealed; and even if I dared to speak, my explanation would seem poor and unsatisfactory. You must have lived through the slow days of torture that I have known to understand all; but the past is irrevocable, and we must part. It will be well for us both if we never meet again—you are strong, but I could not bear it.”

She rose and held out her hand to him with a dignity of beauty made queenly by grief. She, too was strong, and her voice did not falter; but her eyes pleaded for forgiveness, and he answered it by clasping her to his heart. As their lips touched, each felt a bitter sense of the bright possibilities which might have been—and each recognised that inexorable destiny had swept them far asunder.

CHAPTER XVI.

He wandered idly where the light
Of cold and patient stars was shed
On ancient cities—marble white;
And wooed new life—the old was dead.

To her remained the harder strife,
Of changeless days without relief;
To hold the rosary of life,
And count the icy beads of grief.

To mask her secret—to be mute,
When thoughts flowed fast as mountain streams;
To feel life withered at the root,
And dwell alone with mocking dreams.

THE regulations concerning passengers, to which the deliberations of railway directors have given a quasi legal dignity, are prominently displayed at every station on their lines; but the more potent and occult laws influencing modern journeys have never been satisfactorily explained. To deny the existence of such edicts would be to ignore human experience; if matters of gravest importance demand your presence at some distant town, there is a moral certainty that the train by which you travel will arrive at an hour making

the announcement of the time-tables on the subject an exquisite flight of impossible fancy; if you have a consumptive friend with you, there will invariably be in the same compartment an irritable loud-voiced gentleman, whose passion for ventilation will make him abusive if you attempt to close the windows; and if your heart and mind are troubled by sad or anxious thought, there is an overwhelming probability that loquacious strangers will enter into unsolicited conversation with you—will commence endless political arguments, and confidentially enlighten you about the characters of their wives' relations, and the course of their own domestic affairs.

Sydney Mayfield's return to London, after the cruel disappointment he had just experienced, would under no circumstances have been strikingly cheerful; but he was worried to the verge of desperation, by a man whose friendly overtures, made it as difficult to throw him off, as if he had been the old man of the sea, whose attachment was so nearly fatal to Sinbad the Sailor. But even journeys like this must have an end, and Sydney was inexpressibly relieved to hear his fellow pas-

senger say, as the train approached a station a few miles from London—

“I get out here sir, so I can’t finish the story, though it’s very amusing I assure you. Perhaps we shall meet again some day when we’ve more time—meanwhile good-bye. I’ve greatly enjoyed our little chat.”

Sydney’s share in the conversation might almost have been taken for a child’s first lesson in orthography—so scrupulously had it been confined to monosyllables; but he strove to comfort himself by the reflection that a deferential companion, with an actual desire to elicit views, as well as to express them, would have been a more formidable antagonist to encounter. So he endeavoured to say good-night civilly, and when he was at length alone, found it little easier to think calmly of all that had happened the evening before, without the accompaniment of a stream of irrelevant chattering, than it had been with it.

When he arrived at his lodgings he found two letters, both with the London postmark, awaiting him. One of these was from Percy, apologising for his long silence; and telling him of the changes

which had taken place since they had met, including his engagement with Alice.

“I suppose old fellow,” he concluded, “that you are married already, though I don’t understand why you have kept the affair so confoundedly quiet. Morris was the first to tell me about it; and I meant to have congratulated you long ago, I hope we shall not be far from each other—Alice will like Miss Ada amazingly I’m sure—did I ever tell you how much I used to admire her? By the way, it’s rather a droll thing, that two or three years ago it seemed more likely we should change brides. The last sentence is obscure, but you know what I mean, and know equally that I am always

“Your affectionate friend,

“PERCY FENWOOD.”

“He means no harm,” said Sydney to himself, as he paced the room after the perusal of this letter, “but I think I could have borne better that she should have married any other man. What sympathy can she have with such a nature? He is like a feather—gay, graceful, never depressed when there is any wind to blow it, and no human

use whatever. I'm talking bitterly—I have loved him well myself, and though our lives have drifted apart lately, he is dear to me still; but it is hard to think of Alice wedded to an inconstant boy, who can be fooled by any woman with a fair face, and will never understand the value of a heart like hers."

He tried to believe the thought an unworthy one, disloyal to the memory of their old friendship, and finding that he could not blind himself in this fashion, he carelessly opened the other letter. It was from a firm of solicitors stating briefly that by the will of his aunt, the late Miss Dorothy Mayfield the sum of three hundred pounds per annum was bequeathed to him.

The first effect of this announcement was to sting him with a sense of its uselessness. The regret he would under different circumstances have felt at the death of a friend, who with all her peculiarities and caprices, had been uniformly kind to him, was absorbed in the deeper sorrow awakened by Alice's words; and the money seemed of little worth to a man whose life purpose had crumbled into ruins. If the meeting with Alice had ended as he had hoped, he would have been

grateful to know that the legacy (added to his own improved position), would enable him to give her all the luxuries she had been accustomed to ; but now—

His moody thoughts were interrupted by a new reflection—why should he remain in England at all? The deeds of partnership for which he had toiled so long were not yet signed ; and the independent income—now his—although not large, was quite sufficient for his own simple requirements. He had long wished to travel—why not take the present opportunity? To meet Alice as Percy's wife would be torture—worse than that, it would be pain to her. Yet if he remained in London, how could it be avoided? He believed he should ultimately conquer—not love—but the desolating influence of disappointment ; but to do this he must fight many mental battles ; and it would be better to have no witness whose suspicions might be aroused—to be free from the interruption of trivial intercourse, and to surround himself with wholly new ideas. His determination was rapid, and next morning he astonished the architect by informing him that circumstances had arisen which rendered their scheme of partner-

ship impracticable. Mr. Halliday's persuasions were supported by cogent arguments: but Sydney's resolution did not waver, and as soon as business arrangements permitted he started for the Continent, with no clear idea where or how his wanderings would end.

And Alice?

She had the harder part to play, for to her the refuge of activity was denied. The common round of duty had to be performed—unimportant conversations must be sustained—small difficulties must be encountered, the show of interest in the preparations for her wedding must be maintained, and light answers to Percy's letters must be written. She had rarely been successful in concealment, and nothing is so hard to hide as weariness; but few suspected her unhappiness, and no one read the secret of it. Reserve was not an element of her nature, but an external circumstance, which Miss Gordon had made strenuous efforts to arm her with; and once the longing to seek relief in confession almost led her into a confidence, which might have wholly changed the course of after events.

It happened in this way—she was returning from one of the cottages, when she met Mr. Ellis who said to her, after the first words of greeting—

“Is anything the matter Miss Easton? I have fancied lately you looked pale and sad, and to-day you seem like a city maiden compared to the fishermens’ daughters.”

“Do I?” she returned evasively, trying to smile, “everyone is dull sometimes.”

“You used never to be so, in the days when you and poor Datchby rowed out to sea together. Besides you are to be married in three weeks, and don’t you remember Coleridge’s description of a bride—‘Red as a rose is she?’”

“I am not a bride yet Mr. Ellis, and you will surely not blame me for being sorry to leave the place I have lived in all my life.”

The words were little, but something in her voice arrested his attention; and although he said nothing in reply, his kind grey eyes invited her to speak more freely. For a moment she hesitated—if their companionship had been closer in the past, the effort to ask his sympathy, perhaps his help, would not have been so great: as it was her

courage failed her, and she suffered the opportunity to pass.

About this time the portrait of Mr. Fenwood's wife gained an additional interest in her eyes. Among the papers she had been recently examining, were a few in a graceful feminine handwriting, which seemed to accord well with the pensive beauty of the pictured face. Most of them were of slight importance, but one was the copy of a poem which seemed to Alice to reflect the mental development effected by changing scenes. It ran thus—

*I dreamed that life was love, in days of yore,
When breezes laden with the breath of flowers,
Promise of joy upon their light wings bore;
When she was mine and all the world was ours—
When troubles only fell like summer showers
Making the landscape fairer. All was bright
As fancy's hand could paint it; and the powers
Of air and sky conspired to banish night,
And flood the happy world with streams of golden light.*

*I held that life was work—when she and I
Clasped hands in wedded gladness, fearing nought
But separation. Many voices cry
For earnest effort and for lofty thought :
Wrong must be vanquished—battles must be fought —
Oppression 'neath an iron heel be trod—
A heritage for future years be wrought—
The prison'd gem be found below the sod,
And noble temples built wherein to worship God.*

I thought that life was sorrow—when the moon
Shed on her grave a lustre cold and still ;
And all the sweet illusions of the noon,
Lay withered at my feet ; while from the hill
The wind swept down in cadence harsh and shrill.
Each sound seemed vocal with a thought of pain—
I felt my heart grow sick—I knew my will
No longer strong to battle with disdain ;
And mocking failure proved my proud endeavours vain.

I know that life is patience—and I wait
The golden sunrise which has tarried long ;
Whose light reveals a grave, the rough hewn gate
To a diviner city—where the throng
Of happy spirits, join in holy song
Of deepest ecstasy—where all is o'er
That frets the soul or wearies - where the strong
Heroic heart knows fruit of effort sure—
Where life finds larger fields, and she is mine once more.

“It is a grand hope,” murmured Alice, as she laid the poem down, “but my eyes are dim for these far-off results, and the apocalyptic vision is shrouded with mystery. This is the only creed possible for me ; but it is a hard one to learn, after loving as I have done, and knowing that on earth at least—there is no hope of sunrise.”

CHAPTER XVII.

"In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded and shriven
Fair wives for the hearth, and fairsinners for heaven;
But this fairest, my sister, ye think now to wed,
Bid her kneel where she standeth and shrive her instead.
O shrive her and wed not! "

E. B. BROWNING.

THE alterations in the pace of time to which Rosalind so prettily alluded in the first of her forest flirtations with Orlando, are only seeming after all; although the illusion is so perfect that the least imaginative of us, can scarcely help fancying sometimes that the hands upon the dial move with inconstant speed—now lingering painfully, now hurrying impatiently on. But the wheels of Time revolve with the soulless impartiality of mechanical force, whether they produce days of doom or days of glory, of bridal or of death.

Perhaps the last antithesis is hardly so striking as is conventionally supposed, if the vows of mutual love are viewed not only in connection with white

gloves and orange-blossom, but with the association of the dull after-years when the husband has grown weary of his wife, and the wife indifferent to her husband. Still, love is so incomparably the fairest thing in the world that we are tender even to its shadow, unless the reality affects us too nearly to admit the indulgence of sentimental sophistry.

The day fixed for Alice's wedding was thoroughly English in character—not indicative of our climate in its most sullen moods, not rendered intolerable by mist or rain, but bleak and uninviting—fitful gleams of October sunshine, alternating with an unrelieved prospect of leaden clouds.

Of course the villagers mustered in great numbers in the little church long before the time fixed for the service, although the ceremony was to be strictly simple and private. Alice had even hoped the event might not be generally known, but the servants of the Hall having communicated the important secret in strict confidence to their several friends, it was swiftly proved that publicity is possible without the metropolitan device of newspapers.

"I don't see why we need have such a quiet wedding, Alice," Percy had said to her when the final arrangements were being made. "You'll make a beautiful bride, and half the pleasure in being proud of anything is to be seen by a lot of people who are not so well off. There's my cousin, now, Reuben Plunkett, he has one of the ugliest wives in Christendom; I don't like him, and I should enjoy making him uncomfortable. Then there are the Thornhill girls—I'm sure one of them was in love with me, and took no pains to hide it"—

"You are a conceited boy," Alice had replied, smiling in spite of herself.

"Boy, indeed! I am two years older than you, Miss Alice; but you interrupted me, I was just naming some of the people who ought to be asked. There's Mrs. Westbury, and Miss Shoreham, and a dozen more; they will all think it very strange if I ignore them."

"On the contrary," she had answered, "they would be more likely to make ill-natured remarks about your easy forgetfulness of your father. Let us be quite alone, Percy; I know none of these

people well, and you are not so fond of them as to be miserable in their absence."

So he had yielded, no friend being invited except Herbert Morris and Miss Nora Kennedy—a young lady who had sometime before spent a week at Seafern, and had subsequently declared that Alice Easton was her dearest friend. This young lady's father—an old acquaintance of Mr. Fenwood's—had consented to give the bride away with a kindness which he invariably displayed in the bestowal of gifts that did not belong to him.

Percy's plea that the marriage would be too pretty to be unwitnessed, had more reason than his arguments usually possessed; and if there had been any spectator with artistic gifts in the church the faces there might have offered him an attractive study. The fishermen with their wives and daughters, were resplendent in the glory of Sunday attire, and showed not only the varying outlines of feature and the opposing tints of hair perceptible in every crowd, but an interest in the events transpiring, which although deep and universal, sprang from numberless shades of contrasting feeling. There were men present who

had shared with Alice's father the perils of many a wild night at sea, and women who had criticised her mother's beauty in a less kindly spirit than that in which they were now disposed to regard hers. There were many who had said hard things about her in the past, and a few who still thought her proud and cold; but there were others who recalled troubles that she had softened, or saw through their tears the picture of their own homes visited by sickness or shadowed by death, and the fair young girl standing in the midst of their desolation like a redeeming presence.

Mr. Ellis found it no easy task to control the tones of his strong voice into their usual clearness. He remembered how more than twenty years before he had joined the hands of Harry Easton and his girlish bride, and the brief season of wedded gladness which had found so abrupt and dark an end. To a childless man, parting with a friend has a sharper bitterness than to one whose regret is softened by the childish endearments of his own home; and although Alice had never freely confided in him, he loved her beauty, both for its own sake and for the vanished faces which

it recalled, and recently he had caught some truer glimpses of her character too. He hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry about this wedding, which he felt to be the far-off result of his own action in bringing the orphan child to the old Hall; true, he knew nothing of the thoughts and feelings in a young girl's heart, and held very simple views on all romantic questions, but he had keen eyes, and the fact that Alice looked pale without being agitated, and weary without seeming ill, did not escape him.

She wore a dark-blue velvet dress, trimmed with silk of a richness fearful and wonderful to the unsophisticated eyes of the village maidens; her only ornament was a diamond locket Percy had given her the day before, and in this she presented a striking contrast to Miss Kennedy—a rather pretty girl, with a vivid consciousness of the fact (who had shed tears of disappointment on being informed that the wedding was to be strictly private, in no way admitting luminous display of gauze and muslin, or any other of the appendages so dear to the hearts of Court dressmakers and the authors of fashionable novels), and whose

jewels were consequently not very consistent with her otherwise simple attire.

Percy was rather nervous on the interesting occasion, as young bridegrooms commonly are; but his handsome face was greatly admired by his feminine judges, although the majority of the men were of opinion that "a lass as could handle an oar like Miss Alice 'ud better ha' had a bolder lookin' kind o' chap." The group round the altar was completed by Mr. Kennedy, an elderly man of shrewd but not unpleasing appearance, and Herbert Morris, who was divided between admiration of the bride, and doubt whether it would not on the whole, be agreeable to fall in love with the only remaining unmarried lady of the party.

So the simple and inexorable words were spoken—the words which will be deemed sweet as long as young hearts love each other, and regarded as the deluding prologue to a sorry drama, until a mutually dissatisfied couple becomes a thing unknown (a contingency which seems rather remote at present). Alice's responses were made in clear distinct tones, though her voice was very low; throughout the service she maintained a calm

demeanour—once only her lip quivered, but no one except the clergyman noticed this.

The regret Miss Kennedy had felt that the wedding would afford her no opportunity to shine in the orthodox lustre of bridesmaid's attire, was not without a parallel in her father's mind, as it occurred to him that for only three or four guests it was highly improbable a satisfactory breakfast would be provided. Life is full of these disappointments, but for once the heart preparing to enter the furnace of affliction was spared even a singeing, and Mr. Kennedy having arrived, by the time he reached the Hall at a fitting condition of moral resignation and mental fortitude, was relieved to find that the long table in the dining-room was furnished in a manner leaving nothing to be desired.

To Alice everything seemed unreal, and she herself merely an actress in a drama, which would soon be over and forgotten; she heard the speeches—(it has been truly said that if the world were destroyed, and three or four Englishmen survived the wreck, their first proceeding would be to hold a dinner and make speeches about the universal

desolation)—she was touched by the manly kindness of the few words which Mr. Ellis uttered, and faintly amused by Percy's boyish impulsiveness. Mr. Kennedy delivered a long oration of an argumentative character, and Herbert Morris bewailed the miseries of bachelor existence in terms equally lame and pathetic; but although she tried to listen to them, her thoughts in spite of her composed attentive face, were self-willed things, and wandered far away.

Once during the breakfast she heard Herbert Morris say to Percy—

“I'm sorry Mayfield could not be here to-day, do you know where he's gone to?”

“No,” was the careless rejoinder. “Sydney has baffled all my conjectures lately, by always doing exactly the last thing in the world I expected of him. Who'd have thought such a sober-minded practical fellow would set out in quest of adventures like Don Quixote? His last letter to me was very short—just telling me that he was leaving England, and didn't know when he'd come back—that he would be hundreds of miles away on my wedding-day, and so of course could not be

with us; but that he warmly congratulated me, and hoped all happiness awaited me in the future. Your news about him was a pleasant piece of gratuitous fiction Morris."

"Not altogether, I heard about his engagement on good authority, and myself saw them together more than once—there was something between them you may depend upon it; and as for the partnership, the deeds were actually drawn up, and only waited his signature; so why he should throw away such a profitable substance, for the dimmest of shadows is more than I can understand; but it's a strange world, and men's views about self interest vary."

With which profound reflection on human nature, Mr. Morris resumed his interrupted flirtation with Miss Kennedy, and Alice was disturbed from her reverie by a question from Mr. Ellis.

At last the breakfast was over, and the carriage waiting for the bride and bridegroom. They were to travel on the Continent, and Alice who had scarcely been out of the village in her life was to see great cities, and to visit a thousand scenes of

world-wide interest. The thought was not without pleasurable excitement to her, but the parting had to come first; and when the last farewell had been spoken and the carriage was rapidly driving them away, she no longer doubted the reality of the fact that she was leaving her old home, perhaps for ever. She sat silently noting each familiar face among the people scattered along the road, who were waiting patiently for a glimpse of her. When she had waved her hand to the last of these, and strained her eyes as long as a remembered outline of the place was visible, Percy said to her—

“Why Alice—tears in your eyes—to-day?”

“Are there?” she returned, trying to speak lightly, “I thought I had done with such womanish weakness. You must forgive me feeling the parting with them all after so many years, though I have given them such poor cause to love me. Do you remember how angry I was the first day we met, because you said I was a baby? If you call me a baby now that I am nineteen, I suppose I shall have to plead guilty; but I won’t give you any further cause—a lachrymose wife is

the most dismal of companions, and my truest wish is to make you happier than you could be without me."

And the poor child meant it from the depths of her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I know a maiden fair to see
She can both false and friendly be.
And she has hair of a golden hue,
And what she says, it is not true,
She gives thee a garland woven fair,
It is a fool's-cap for thee to wear.

Take care !

Beware ! Beware !

Trust her not,

She is fooling thee.

LONGFELLOW.

“Mud, fog, and rain—how I hate these November days ! There’s another hour before dinner, and I’ve nothing to do—after all it’s a tiresome old world.”

The process of induction by which Miss Ethel Stafford arrived at this conclusion, was not strictly Baconian ; but as instances in support of this pessimist view of mundane existence could easily be multiplied, and as moreover she was not accustomed to trouble herself about logic, the proposition naturally seemed incontrovertible ; so with a

pout of tacit protest against dreariness in general, and November dreariness in particular, she turned from the window and sought consolation in the mirror.

If her object was to look at something pleasanter than a long street, traversed by straggling pedestrians with shiny umbrellas, she was not likely to be disappointed; for the faithful glass showed that candour may be compelled to play the courtier, and simple truth become the most delicate flattery. Ethel Stafford was not beautiful, there was nothing in her face, even remotely suggestive of the tragic muse, no artist would have selected her as the embodiment of any heroic ideal, but if abnormal feats of daring, unconventional heights of renunciation and protracted achievements of endurance were put out of the question—if in fact her portrait were accepted as the likeness of a young lady moving in the higher grades of middle-class society, living in a Clapham house, and dressing in the latest fashion, few men would have been content with a single glance at it.

As she stood before the glass, re-arranging the heavy tresses of her fair hair, the perception of

this seemed to place the universe in a more agreeable light; and her lips parted into a smile of self-satisfaction. At this moment the door opened, and a boy of about sixteen entered the room: from his likeness to her, it was easy to see that he was her brother; although his face had at once more character, and less regular beauty than hers.

"It's a most remarkable thing," he observed, with a touch of conscious superiority in his voice, "that girls are always looking in the glass, I think if all the mirrors were destroyed, every woman in the world would go and live by a river."

"What for you silly boy?"

"That she might see her own face in it of course; and I'll tell you another thing Miss Ethel, since we are on the subject; if the rivers dried up their hearts would break—yours would at any rate—I'll tell Mr. Heatherly so, next time I see him."

"And do you suppose I should care?"

"I hope you would," replied the boy more gravely, "for he is the noblest and kindest fellow

I ever knew—he loves you Ethel, and you told me once, you loved him. For my part I would sooner see you his wife, poor as he is, than married to any other man in England.”

“What do you know about it Walter? Boys are always pretending to understand things of which they are sublimely ignorant. There—you needn’t tell me—I’m going upstairs to dress for dinner.”

John Heatherly had been Walter’s tutor, and the one grave indiscretion of Ethel Stafford’s life, was that she had suffered herself to fall in love with him, wholly forgetting that the most hopeful view of his future, would be the attainment of a narrow competence, by no means equal to meeting the various requirements of such a fanciful young lady as herself. And yet it had been sweet to win the homage, clearly expressed long before it dared to shape itself in words—to know that he loved to read the meaning, or what he fancied was the meaning of her eyes better than the wisest of his books—and at last to be spoken to in words of tenderness and passion. But all this happened a year ago—she was only seventeen

then, and the intervening months had made her a more devout believer in her mother's prudential philosophy. The hours they had spent together were very pleasant while they lasted, but it was as idle to be influenced by the romantic folly of the past, as by the childish faith in fairyland.

Perhaps the reflection that the most agreeable people were generally poor, and so rendered practically useless, may have co-operated with the November weather in giving a sombre tint to Ethel Stafford's thoughts. A feeling parallel to her brother's boyish hero-worship she had never known; but she had liked and admired John Heatherly, and if some benevolent relation had only made a will in his favour and then "shuffled off this mortal coil" so as to enable the bequest to come into effect, she would have written many graceful little notes to him containing the assurance that he was dear to her now, as he had ever been—that a woman's loyalty could never waver, that she loved once and for ever.

But it is not appointed to every one to possess opulent and affectionate relations, whose dis-

interestedness makes legal phraseology poetical, and whose constitutions induce them to quit this unsatisfactory world precisely at the time when they can be best spared. The tone of Ethel Stafford's mind was not oppressively practical—her scheme of the universe comprehended a large amount of sentiment; she had that very morning shed tears over a novel in which the heroine had rejected a baron for the sake of a wandering minstrel, and had existed for a volume and a half in a lonely forest on the scarcely nourishing diet of bread and water; but the maiden who betrayed such touching fidelity had lived in Germany, and both she and her lover had possessed unpronounceable names. In a Clapham residence, with no relatives gloomy or criminal enough to sustain romance, it was different, and these transcendental ethics would have been as much out of place as a mediæval costume at a dinner party. Ethel's meditations were not of a conflicting character: the difficulty experienced by so many minds as to the respective places in life of the conventional and the ideal, she solved by a simple expedient. When thought was impersonal and general, she

gave entire freedom to fancy, and persuaded herself by the aërial architecture, not of majestic castles, but of picturesque villa residences, that she was essentially imaginative; but whenever any practical decision was needed, she justified her mother's frequently expressed opinion that "Ethel had as much common sense as many women twice her age."

Thus she had listened to John Heatherly's wooing as though it had been music; and intoxicated by the sweetness of the moment, had confessed a love which even had it been the reality she thought it, her calmer judgment would have taught her to conceal. But although this remembrance was disconcerting, it was not worth serious regret—"Everyone is foolish sometimes," she thought, "he is far too clever to think long of me, and after all it was very pleasant at the time; but here am I in this miserably cold room and the bell is ringing for dinner—it's very early."

The sound ceased abruptly, and Ethel found on reaching the dining-room that the bell had been rung by her sister Daisy, a pretty little girl of five years old, who was ingeniously endeavouring

to attach the blame to Nellie, a graver looking child about two years older. The true delinquent however, received the orthodox reproof, and was then embraced and forgiven ; for Mr. Stafford was expected home in a few minutes, and far more serious offences would have been condoned to avoid domestic scenes in his presence.

Ethel had not seen the children all day, and was never a frequent visitor to the nursery ; but now they were washed to an artistic polish, their hair curled and their clean pinafores put on, she greeted them with playful affection, though it is doubtful whether her caresses would have been so freely given, if she had not known that in another half-hour inexorable law would banish them to bed.

Mrs. Stafford, who completed the group in the dining-room, was a slight fair woman about eight and thirty years of age. She had probably been pretty as a girl, but now that the bloom had faded from her cheeks, the fact that her eyes though bright and blue, were small and lacking expression could not escape observation. Her lips too, were thin and compressed, and her manner was too apt to give the impression to a stranger that she was

eyeing him with unfriendly scrutiny. Still, there was nothing malevolent in her appearance, and the evident pride with which she glanced at Ethel softened her face in a way that showed her not altogether lacking in womanly feeling.

"There's papa's knock," said Daisy, and in another minute Mr. Stafford entered the room.

He was probably two or three years older than his wife; about the middle height, but broad-shouldered and strongly built. As he caressed the younger children his face seemed kind, though its normal expression was one of shrewdness, not unmixed with satirical humour. On the whole, his appearance was in his favour, but he was more likely to invite confidence on the subject of an investment for money than on any theme affecting the feelings. He greeted Ethel warmly, but merely acknowledged Walter's presence by a good-natured nod.

The conversation at the dinner-table after the little ones had disappeared, was for the most part trivial and uninteresting; but at length Mr. Stafford said—

"Oh, by the way, that reminds me I was told

rather a singular story to-day. You've heard me speak of my poor sister Grace?"

"The one who married a fisherman?" inquired his wife severely, for with her any transgression against social propriety was classed among the deadly sins.

"Yes; it was a great pity. My father was only a country boat-builder then, and the business returns were very different to what I've made them; but it was marrying beneath her, and we all strongly disapproved of it. Well, we lost sight of her soon after her marriage, and I haven't heard her name mentioned by anybody for years; but to-day I was told, by a chain of coincidences I needn't trouble you with, that both she and her husband had died years ago, leaving one child, a girl"—

"Is she alone and friendless?" asked Walter, with a boy's quick sympathy.

Mr. Stafford smiled good-naturedly, though not without a touch of irony.

"There is no opportunity for knight errantry here," he said, "the young lady was wiser than her mother, though like her she disregarded the

expectations of society. How the affair came about I don't know, but she has just married the only son of a country squire, who died recently leaving nearly all his property to his boy. It's not an immense fortune, but quite enough to live very well on—about forty or fifty thousand pounds, I think."

Mrs. Stafford looked relieved. After all, judgment must be tempered with mercy, and unless sin is hereditary it is hard always to visit the transgressions of the mother upon the child. As a penniless girl, this newly-discovered niece might have been liable to be severely criticised, but equity demanded that the extenuating circumstances of the prudent wedding and the fifty thousand pounds should be considered too.

"Dear me," she remarked, with a sigh of mild surprise at the mysterious dispensations of Providence, "and the poor girl is an orphan. I should like to know her."

"Well, you can if you wish to; they have taken a house at the West End, and when they return from the Continent I should really be glad if you will call. I could easily get you the address,

and you might take the opportunity of one of your numerous shopping excursions in that direction. Of course, Mrs. Fenwood—that's the child's new name I'm told—is Ethel's own cousin, and they ought to know each other."

"I should like that very much," said Ethel, who had been listening to her father's story with the same interest she had that morning given to the German heroine's adventures, and was relieved that this tale had a more agreeable termination than the other. "Can you not tell us more about your sister, papa?"

Mr. Stafford readily complied, and one reminiscence naturally suggesting another, he told Ethel and Walter anecdotes of the far-off past until quite late, the clustering memories softening the expression of his face and modulating the tones of his rather harsh voice, until his business acquaintances would scarcely have known him, and Mr. McNab, the junior partner in the firm of McAllister Ferguson and Co., who had left his counting-house that morning heavy of heart at being defeated in a bargain, would have refused to believe the testimony of his own eyes.

It is a pity we are not oftener influenced by the gentle memories of the past ; in the rough battle of life, while we are struggling with fierce energy for wealth or fame, or whatever painted bubble it is our ambition to grasp, while we are condemning the errors of one, or misjudging the motives of another, our hard hearts might learn the Divine lessons of compassion and tenderness if we only recalled the days when faith and not atheism was the natural bias of our minds—when we looked over the same picture-book with a baby sister, or saw the whole world brightened by the sacred beauty of a mother's face.

END OF VOL. I.

